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E. V. LUCAS

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A Selection only.

# MIXED VINTAGES

A BLEND OF ESSAYS OLD AND NEW

BY

E. V. LUCAS

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

*First Published in 1919*

# PREFACE

THE ingredients of this volume have been collected from three recent collections of essays, one or two miscellaneous books, and from my contributions to *Punch, Land and Water,* and *The Outlook.* The account of the first Zeppelin attack on London is now printed for the first time.

E. V. L.

*June* 1919.

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# MIXED VINTAGES

## ON BEING SOMEBODY ELSE[1]

WALKING along Oxford Street the other day, I was aware of a new kind of cheap photographer's into which people were pouring as though it were a cinema and Mr. Chaplin were on view. And, after examining the specimen photographs in the frame by the door, I joined them, not for the purpose of facing the camera, but to observe young men and women in the entertaining pastime of escaping from the fact, or, in other words, of assuming more agreeable identities than their own.

For the novel characteristic of this studio is that for the trifling sum of one shilling it provides its patrons with six postcard photographs of themselves in fancy dress; or, as a leaflet before me states, a shade too loosely perhaps for Lindley Murray, but with perfect clarity, beneath a list of scores of costumes, 'Every customer ordering six postcards for 1s. are entitled to use which one of these garments they think best, free of charge.' What a privilege! The list is exhaustive. It begins with Cowboys,

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

goes on to Cowgirls, Indian Chiefs, Indian Man, Policeman, Pierrots, Mexicans, Nuns, Whittington's Cat, Quaker Girls, Jockeys, Gent's Evening Suit, Gipsies, Highwaymen, Priests, John Bull, Cricketer, Old Maid, Harem Skirt, Father Christmas, French Soldier, Aviator, Costers, Beefeaters, Buckingham suit, Nell Gywnne, Ladies' Evening Dress, Ladies' Tights, Boxer, King, Clown. The organization is perfect. First the queue, then the ticket, then the choice of costume from the wardrobe upstairs, then the donning of it behind a screen, performed with infinite giggling when it is masculine and the wearer a girl, and then the taking of the photograph, which I can assure you is not allowed to occupy more than a few seconds. The only weak spot in the concern is the delay in developing and printing, for the client has to wait a day or so for the glorious results. Still, as a variation upon the drab routine of twentieth-century city life, not bad, is it?

Judging by specimen photographs of the happy masqueraders, the cowboy costume stands very high in favour and is the most popular male dress for young women. These are to be seen also in many varieties of man's attire, even to that of the police, looking for the most part smirkingly self-conscious but wholly satisfied. That no one would ever be taken in as to their sex matters nothing. A wooden horse of high mettle, obviously by a sire and dam with classic sawdust in their veins, lends

verisimilitude to the cowboy illusion, and it is amusing to see this very recognizable noble animal turning up again and again in the pictures, always under perfect control. Some of the new Army doctors, who by the regulations are forced to wear spurs, but have never spurred anything in their lives, might, by the way, like to know of this placid charger. They are certain to wish to distribute a few photographs of themselves.

I have made only a selection from the costumes supplied. I might have added many more, such as naval officers and Red Cross nurses, both of which, I am told, are in great demand. I might, too, have mentioned the one that, after the 'Buckingham suit' (which is perhaps merely a euphemism for Court dress), is most perplexing to me. This is described curtly as 'draper.' Who on earth wants to spend a shilling to be photographed as a draper? And what is a draper's costume? I have seen thousands of drapers, but they did not differ from haberdashers, tailors, chemists, or hotel clerks. Dan Leno's shopwalker is probably the type selected—poor Dan having also confused the two functions; for a shopwalker only walks the shop, whereas the deathless figure invented by that ever-to-be-mourned comedian acted as a salesman too.

That the studio is a success was inevitable, and I expect a great crop of imitations. For it is based on a sound knowledge of human nature. Its origina-

tors know life. Every one who has ever been a child remembers the excitement of dressing up. No game without dressing up in it could compare with one in which a father's tall hat, a mother's best dress, and a hairy hearthrug were introduced; and very few of us ever cease wholly to be children. As the poet says, 'we are but children of a larger growth.' Throughout life, for most of us, to be somebody else is the thing. Well, at this studio young people who are no longer children play at being children once more. After working all day as clerks, or shopmen, or typists, or domestic servants, how delightful to come here and evade destiny by masquerading as highwaymen, bushrangers, Queens of the Carnival, Dreadnought commanders, and George the Fifth's courtiers! Better still, how tonic to the self-esteem to be taken in the act of complete mastery of a spirited horse! And what pictures to send away! What gallant portraiture for the provinces!

And—if we only knew—what an invigoration of ordinary life for a while! I like to think that the effect upon a little lodging-house drudge of having been a Queen of the Carnival long enough for the evidence of the camera (which cannot lie) to be secured, cannot wear off at once. Surely she carries her head a shade higher in consequence, and bears the censure of her mistress with increased fortitude? I hope so: I believe so. And I can imagine a general

toning-up of self-esteem in many a shop-bound youth in the knowledge, abundantly furnished by these postcards, that were he really the rightful possessor of a naval uniform he would not disgrace it, but pursue the *Schmutzigehund,* or whatever German cruiser came his way, as resolutely and effectively as Sir David Beatty himself; and this being so, in spite of fate's embargo, he does not do his less illustrious work any the worse. And many a seamstress might with more composure view her inability to be smoothing the pillow and winning the heart and hand of a wounded officer if her eyes could now and then be refreshed by furtive peeps at herself in a Red Cross costume, and see how well she would look as a nurse (her true vocation) if only the gods were kinder.

The strength of this studio is that in it the gods can be made kinder—momentarily.

## LÉON BONVIN[1]

THAT beautiful phrase of the Persian poet on his crucified hero—*I never saw a tree, before this, enabled to sustain all that was generous*—has an oddly close parallel, which I am tempted to record here : a phrase, not less beautiful, used by a modern Frenchman, also of a dead man and a tree. It occurs in a letter written by François Bonvin on the death of his brother, Léon, the painter of flowers. Léon Bonvin's work is little known and there is little of it, but those who possess examples treasure them like black pearls. François Bonvin, who is represented in the National Gallery, in the modern French and Dutch room, by a scene of cattle painted with great decision and confidence and breadth, and who died in 1888, was the son of a policeman at Vaugiraud, on the outskirts of Paris : an old soldier who divided his time between protecting the property of the market gardeners and constructing rockeries for poor people's windows. Another, and the youngest son, was Léon, who after a shy and lonely boyhood and youth, under the tyranny of his father, which was mitigated by rambles in the neighbouring

[1] From *A Boswell of Baghdad* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

forest of Meudon, gathering flowers and painting them under his brother's encouragement with a felicity and fidelity that have not been surpassed, fell, when still quite young, into the hands of a shrewish vulgar wife, and with her opened a tavern. No couple could be more ill-assorted than this gentle creature, full of poetry and feeling, whose one ambition was to set exquisitely on paper the blossoms which gave him pleasure, and the noisy, bustling, angry woman whom he had married.

The union and the commercial venture were alike disastrous; unhappiness was accompanied by poverty, and after a short period of depression the unfortunate artist, early one morning, in his thirty-third year, wandered into the forest of Meudon, where the world had once spread so happily before his eyes, and hanged himself.

All this happened in the middle years of the last century, when the same revival of nature-worship was inspiring painters in France as had, fifty years earlier, flushed Wordsworth's poetry, and such famous and more fortunate contemporaries of Léon Bonvin as Corot and Rousseau and Millet and Daubigny and Jacque and Dupré were painting in the forest of Fontainebleau. Theirs to succeed; poor Léon found life too hard, and was dead when still far from his prime.

And what of the notable phrase? It is one that I know I shall never forget, one that will remain

indissolubly linked to the name of Bonvin, whether it is Léon who inspired it or François who penned it and who had been so useful in providing his brother with the materials for his one absorbing pleasure and had always exhorted him to ' do everything from nature.' Writing to some one of influence in Paris, François told the story of his brother's death. In a postscript he added the information that the weight of Léon's body had broken a branch of the tree. Then came the words : ' This is the only damage he ever did.'

Could there be a more beautiful epitaph or a more poignant commentary on a world askew ?

## THE TWO PERKINSES[1]

WALKING in the garden in the cool of the July evening, I was struck afresh by the beauty of that climbing rose we call Dorothy Perkins, and by her absolute inability to make a mistake. There are in this garden several of these ramblers, all heritages from an earlier tenant and all very skilfully placed: one over an arch, one around a window, and three or four clambering up fir posts on which the stumps of boughs remain; and in every case the rose is flowering more freely than ever before, and has arranged its blossoms, leaves, and branches with an exquisite and impeccable taste. Always lovely, Dorothy Perkins is never so lovely as in the evening, just after the sun has gone, when the green takes on a new sobriety against which her gay and tender pink is gayer and more tender. 'Pretty little Dolly Perkins!' I said to myself involuntarily, and instantly, by the law of association—which, I sometimes fondly suppose, is more powerful with me than with many people—I began to think of another evening, twenty and more years ago, when for the first time I heard the most dainty of English comic

[1] From *A Boswell of Baghdad* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

songs sung as it should be, with the first words of the chorus accentuated like hammer blows in unison :

She—was—as—

and then tripping merrily into the rest of it :

—beautiful as a butterfly,
As fair as a queen,
Was pretty little Polly Perkins
Of Paddington Green.

It is given to most of us—not always without a certain wistful regret—to recall the circumstances under which we first heard our favourite songs ; and on the evening when I met 'Pretty Polly Perkins' I was on a tramp steamer in the Mediterranean, when at last the heat had gone and work was over and we were free to be melodious. My own position on this boat was nominally purser, at a shilling a month, but in reality passenger, or super-cargo, spending most of the day either in reading or sleeping. The second engineer, a huge Sussex man, whose favourite theme of conversation with me was the cricket of his county, was, it seemed, famous for this song ; and that evening, as we sat on a skylight, he was suddenly withdrawn from a eulogy of the odd ways and deadly left-handers of poor one-eyed 'Jumper' Juniper (whom I had known personally, when I was a small schoolboy, in a reverential way) to give the company 'Pretty Polly Perkins.' In vain to say that he was busy, talking to me ; that

he was dry; that he had no voice. 'Pretty Polly Perkins' had to be sung, and he struck up without more ado:

> I'm a broken-hearted milkman,
> In woe I'm arrayed,
> Through keeping the company of
> A young servant maid—

and so forth. And then came the chorus, which has this advantage over all other choruses ever written, that the most tuneless singer on earth (such as myself) and the most shamefaced (I am autobiographical again) can help to swell, at any rate, the notable opening of it, and thus ensure the success of the rest.

That evening, as I say, was more than twenty years ago, and I had thought in the interval little enough of the song until the other pretty Perkins suggested it; but I need hardly say that the next day came a further reminder of it (since that is one of the queer rules of life) in the shape of a Chicago weekly paper with the information that America knows 'Pretty Polly Perkins' too.

The ballads of a nation for the most part respect their nationality, but now and then there is free trade in them. It has been so with 'Pretty Polly Perkins'; for it seems that, recognizing its excellence, an American singer prepared, in 1864, a version to suit his own country, choosing, as it happens, not New York or Washington as the background of the

milkman's love drama, but the home of Transatlantic culture itself, Boston. Paddington Green would, of course, mean nothing to American ears, but Boston is happy in the possession of a Pemberton Square, which may, for all I know, be as important to the Hub of the Universe as Merrion Square is to Dublin, and Polly was, therefore, made comfortable there, and, as Pretty Polly Perkins of Pemberton Square, became as famous as, in our effete hemisphere, Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green. The adapter deserves great credit for altering as little as possible. Beyond Polly's abode, and the necessary rhymes to mate with Square, he did nothing, so that the song, while transplanted to America, remained racy of the English capital. It was still the broken-hearted milkman who sang it, and the *dénouement*, which is so very English—and, more than English, Cockney —was unaltered :

In six months she married,
That hard-hearted girl ;
It was not a squire,
And it was not a nearl.
It was not a baronet,
But a shade or two wuss—
'Twas the wulgar old driver
Of a twopenny 'bus.

But the story of Polly is nothing. The merit of the song is its air, the novelty and ingenuity of its chorus, and the praises of Polly which the chorus embodies. The celebration of charming women is

never out of date. Some are sung about in the Mediterranean, some in Boston, and some all the world over ; others give their names to roses.

So far had I written—and published—in a weekly paper, leaving open a loophole or two for kind and well-instructed readers to come to my aid ; and as usual (for I am very fortunate in these matters) they did so. Before I was a month older I knew all. I knew that the author, composer, and singer of 'Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green' were one and the same : the famous Harry Clifton ; and that Polly married 'not the wulgar old driver' of a twopenny 'bus, as was my mistaken belief, but quite the reverse—that is to say, the 'bandy-legged conductor' of the same vehicle. A gentleman in Ireland was even so obliging as to send me another ballad by Harry Clifton, on the front of which is his portrait and on the back a list of his triumphs—and they make very startling reading, at any rate to me, who have never been versatile. The number of songs alone is appalling : no fewer than thirty to which he had also put the music and over fifty to which the music was composed by others, but which with acceptance he sang. Judging by the titles and the first lines, which in the advertisement are always given, these songs of the sixties were very much better things than most of the songs of our enlightened day. They seem to have had character, a humorous sententiousness, and a genial view of

life. And judging by his portrait on the cover, Harry Clifton was a kindly, honest type of man, to whom such accessories of the modern comic singer's success as the well-advertised membership of a night club, or choice of an expensive restaurant, were a superfluity.

Having read these letters and the list of songs, I called on a friend who was at that moment lying on a bed of sickness, from which, alas! he never rose—the late George Bull, the drollest raconteur in London, and one of the best of men, who, so far as I am concerned, carried away with him an irreplaceable portion of the good humour of life; and I found that the name of Harry Clifton touched more than one chord. He had heard Harry Clifton sing. As a child, music-halls were barred to him, but Harry Clifton, it seems, was so humane and well-grounded—his fundamentals, as Dr. Johnson would say, were so sound—that he sang also at Assembly Rooms, and there my friend was taken, in his tender years, by his father, to hear him. There he heard the good fellow, who was conspicuously jolly and most cordially Irish, sing several of his great hits, and in particular 'A Motto for Every Man,' 'Paddle Your Own Canoe,' and 'Lannigan's Ball' (set to a most admirable jig tune which has become a classic), one phrase from which was adopted into the Irish vernacular as a saying: 'Just in time for Lannigan's ball.' Clifton might indeed be called the Tom Moore of his day,

with as large a public, although not quite so illigant a one. For where Moore warbled to the ladies, Clifton sang to the people. Such a ballad as that extolling the mare of Pat of Mullingar must have gone straight to the hearts of the countrymen of Mr. Flurry Knox:

They may talk of Flying Childers,
And the speed of Harkaway,
Till the fancy it bewilders
As you list to what they say.
But for rale blood and beauty,
You may travel near and far—
The fastest mare you'll find belongs
To Pat of Mullingar.

An old lady in Dublin who remembers Clifton singing this song tells me that the chorus, 'So we 'll trot along O,' was so descriptive, both in words and music, that one had from it all the sensations of a 'joult.'

Harry Clifton seems to have had three distinct lines — the comic song, of which 'Pretty Polly Perkins' may be considered the best example; the Irish song; and the Motto song, inculcating a sweet reasonableness and content amid life's many trials and tribulations. Although, no doubt, such optimism was somewhat facile, it cannot be denied that a little dose of silver-lining advice, artfully concealed in the jam of a good tune and a humorous twist of words, does no harm, and may have a beneficial

effect. The chorus of ' A Motto for Every Man,' for example, runs thus :

> We cannot all fight in this battle of life,
> The weak must go to the wall.
> So do to each other the thing that is right,
> For there 's room in this world for us all.

An easy sentiment : but sufficient people in the sixties were attracted by it to flock to hear Harry Clifton all over England and Ireland, and it is probable that most came away with momentarily expanded bosoms, and a few were stimulated to follow its precepts.

Looking down this remarkable list of titles and first lines—which may be only a small portion of Harry Clifton's output—I am struck by his cleanliness and sanity. His record was one of which he might well be proud, and I think that old Fletcher of Saltoun, who had views on the makers of a nation's ballads, would probably have clapped him on the back.

Another thing. If many of the tunes to these songs are as good as that to ' Polly Perkins,' Harry Clifton's golden treasury should be worth mining. The songs of yesterday, when revived, strike one as being very antiquated, and the songs of the day before yesterday also rarely bear the test ; but what of the songs of the sixties ? Might their melodies not strike freshly and alluringly on the ear to-day ? Another, and to-day a better known, Harry—Harry

Lauder—whose tunes are always good, has confided to an interviewer that he finds them for the most part in old traditional collections, and gives them new life. He is wise. John Stuart Mill's fear that the combinations of the notes of the piano might be used up was probably fantastic, but the arrival of the luckless day would at any rate be delayed if we revived tunes that were old enough for that process; and why should not the works of Harry Clifton be examined for the purpose? But perhaps they have been . . .

And then we come back to the marvel, to me, of the man's variousness. I can plead guilty to having written the words of a dozen songs or so in as many years, but to put two notes of music together is beyond me, and to sing anything in tune would be an impossibility, even if I had the assurance to stand up in public for that purpose. Yet Harry Clifton, who, in the picture on the cover of the song which the gentleman in Ireland sent me, does not look at all like some brazen lion comiques, not only could sing acceptably, but write good words and good music. I hope he grew prosperous, although there is some evidence that his native geniality was also a stumbling-block. Your jolly good fellows so often are the victims of their jolly goodness. Nor had the palmy days of comic singing then begun. There were then no £300 a week bribes to lure a comic singer into *revue*; but the performers, I guess, were

none the worse for receiving a wage more in accordance with true proportion. I say true proportion, because I shall never feel it right that music-hall comedians should receive a bigger salary than a Prime Minister; at least, not until they sing better songs and take a finer view of life in their 'patter' than most of them now do.

## A LESSON [1]

GOD—it is notorious—works in a mysterious way to get morality and decency into us; which is another way of saying that not all light is communicated by the Episcopal bench, by clerks in holy orders, by divines who do not conform, or by editors at Whitefield's Tabernacle.

The other day, for example, I had lunch with a very charming actress in a pleasant restaurant.

'Rather a funny thing happened the last time I was here,' she remarked.

'Yes?' I replied languidly.

'About you.'

'Oh!' I said with animation. 'Do tell me.'

'It was also at lunch,' she explained. 'The people at the next table were talking about you. I couldn't help hearing a little. A man there said he had met you in Shanghai.'

'Not really!' I exclaimed.

'Yes. He met you in Shanghai.'

'That 's frightfully interesting,' I said. 'What did he say about me?'

'That 's what I couldn't hear,' she replied. 'You

[1] From *A Boswell of Baghdad* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

see, I had to pay some attention to my own crowd. I only caught the word " delightful." '

Ever since she told me this I have been turning it over in my mind ; and it is particularly vexing not to know more. ' Delightful ' can be such jargon and mean nothing—or, at any rate, nothing more than amiability. Still, that is something, for one is not always amiable, even when meeting strangers. On the other hand, it might be, from this man, the highest praise.

The whole thing naturally leads to thought, because I have never been farther east than Athens in my life.

What did the man mean ? Can we possibly visit other cities in our sleep ? Has each of us an *alter ego*, who can really behave, elsewhere ?

Whether we have or not, I know that this information about my Shanghai double is going to be a great nuisance to me. It is going to change my character. In fact, it has already begun to change it. Let me give you an example.

Only yesterday I was about to be very angry with a telegraph boy who brought back a telegram I had despatched about two hours earlier, saying that it could not be delivered because it was insufficiently addressed. Obviously it was not the boy's fault, for he belonged to our country post office, and the telegram had been sent to London and was returned from there ; and yet I started to abuse that boy as

though he were not only the Postmaster-General himself, but the inventor of red-tape into the bargain. And all for a piece of carelessness of my own.

And then suddenly I remembered Shanghai and how delightful I was there. And I shut up instantly, and apologized, and rewrote the message, and gave the boy a shilling for himself. If one could be delightful in Shanghai one must be delightful at home too.

And so it is going to be. There is very little fun for me in the future, and all because of that nice-mannered double in Shanghai whom I must not disgrace. For it would be horrible if one day a lady told him that she had overheard some one who had met him in London and found him to be a bear.

## THE BEAUTIFUL WORDS

I HAVE to tell an unvarnished tale of real and recent life in London. When the absence of impulsive benevolence and public virtue is so often insisted upon, it is my duty to put the following facts on record.

It was, as it now always is, a wet day. The humidity not only descended from a pitiless sky, but ascended from the cruel pavements which cover the stony heart of that stony-hearted stepmother, London. Need I say that under these conditions no cabs were obtainable; in other words it was one of those days, so common of late, when other people engage the cabs first. They were plentiful enough, full. One could have been run over and killed by them twenty times between Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus, but all teemed with selfish life. Men of ferocious concentration and women detestable in their purposefulness were to be seen through the passing windows. It was a day on which no one ever got out of a cab at all, except to tell it to wait. No flag was ever up. Since the armistice these days have been the rule.

Not only were the cabs all taken and reserved till

to-morrow, but the 'buses were overcrowded too. A line of swaying men, steaming from the deluge, intervened in every 'bus between two rows of seated women, also steaming. It was a day on which the conductors and conductresses were always ringing the bell three times.

There was also (for we are at times very thorough in England) a strike on the Tube and the Underground.

Having to get to Harley Street, I walked up Regent Street, doing my best to shelter beneath an umbrella, and (being a believer in miracles) turning my head back at every other step in the hope that a cab with its flag up might suddenly materialize; but hoping against hope. It was miserable, it was depressing, and it was really rather shameful: by January 1919 A.D. (I thought) more should have been achieved by boastful mankind in the direction of weather control.

And then the strange thing happened which it is my purpose and pride to relate. A taxi drew up beside me and I was hailed by its occupant. In a novel the hailing voice would be that of a lady or a Caliph *incog.*, and it would lure me to adventure or romance. But this was desperately real, damp, disgusting normal life, and the speaker was merely a man like myself.

'Hullo!' he said, calling me by name, and following the salutation by the most grateful and comfort-

ing words that the human tongue could at that moment utter.

Every one has seen the Confession Albums, where complacent or polite visitors are asked to state what in their opinions is the most beautiful this, that and the other, always including 'the most beautiful form of words.' Serious people quote from DANTE or KEATS or SHAKESPEARE; flippant persons write 'Not guilty' or 'Will you have it notes or cash?' or 'This way to the exit.' Henceforth I shall be in no doubt as to my own reply. I shall set down the words used by this amazing god in the machine, this prince among all princely bolts from the blue. 'Hullo,' he said, 'let me give you a lift.'

I could have sobbed with joy as I entered the cab —perhaps I did sob with joy—and heard him telling the driver the number in Harley Street for which I was bound.

That is the story—true and rare. How could I refrain from telling it when impulsive benevolence and public virtue are so rare? It was my duty.

## THREE TO FOUR

THOSE who are old tell me that when one is old one sleeps with greater and greater difficulty and lies awake longer. This means that instead of the dread hour between three and four A.M. there will be perhaps two dread hours.

It is not to be contemplated.

For that benefactor of mankind who, without drugs, would devise a cure for wakefulness, no reward is too rich. It is idle to talk about exercise and open-air toil and physical tiredness—those are counsels of perfection—because I mean a cure for wakefulness in those persons in cities who necessarily live an unhealthy or over-civilized life and have no opportunity of returning to nature and tilling the soil and doing any of those natural things which make for honest exhaustion. To him should monuments be erected; to him should grants of money and the thanks of both Houses of Parliament be voted. Upon him, if any one, should titles be conferred.

It is not only that it is acutely fatiguing, and therefore subsequently, as well as momently, dispiriting to be awake between three and four, but the sixty (or is it six thousand?) minutes between

those hours become each a counsel for the prosecution, armed with a very circumstantial brief. 'Confound the fellows!' you say; 'they know everything!' and what makes it worse is that your own man, the counsel for the defence, is missing. To buy oneself at one's own three to four valuation, and sell oneself at after-lunch prices (a bottle of Corton and a Corona-Corona assisting the appraisement), would be the high road to a fortune.

Once upon a time, not so long ago it seems to me (who have, however, no accurate memory for anything), I used to lay my head on the pillow at about 11.30, go to sleep instantly, and awake refreshed and ready for the new day at eight. Never again; but why not? Why should one lose this valuable gift? I still go to sleep easily, but why should I now, between three and four, turn from side to side and repeat verses; try to make my mind a blank or to force my thoughts backwards instead of forwards—to think ahead being one of the least soporific of actions; count respiration; and resort to all the well-known devices? Sooner or later something is successful, or from sheer weariness one falls asleep? Even then the sleep is worth nothing; one had better, especially in warm weather, have been out and about, listening to the birds. 'Nature's sweet restorer,' when robbed of its restorative properties, is useless —or nearly so.

This failure to sleep between three and four has

another bad consequence, for it often makes one slumber so heavily when it is time to get up that one is awakened only with difficulty, and then one feels the effects of a violently broken stupor for hours after it. For the benefit of others in a like unhappy plight, let me say that in my own experience counting respiration is the best; and a refinement upon this which I have not yet had energy to try, but which has been recommended to me, is to have a pencil and pad on which, of course in the dark, to mark each inhalation or exhalation—the double exercise of counting and marking being said to have a peculiarly drowsifying effect. But, heavens, what a business! Something must have gone very wrong either with the world or with oneself for so simple a need as slumber to be lured only by arithmetic and calligraphy.

'How if,' said a friend of mine the other day—and as he has a number of thoughtful novels and plays to his name and never speaks lightly, he has to be taken seriously—'how if the mind is clearer and truer between three and four than at any other time?' In other words, how if oneself as one views it then, all bare and pitiful, is the real self, and the self that one carries about in broad day, not only with complacence but sometimes even with admiration, is the impostor, the illusory creation of sunshine and breakfast? That is a searching and disquieting proposition, if you like, and personally I refuse to

believe it, and yet not without a misgiving now and then. For one's mind, there is no doubt about it, can have at that dread season a clarity that is painful. But one must guard against such a theory or one could not go on. And one thing that helps me to believe that my own intellectual machinery (such as it is) is in capable condition between three and four is that I defer for so long the sensible course of lighting the lamp and taking a book. In normal daylight hours I am wont to be decisive and swift rather than not, but between three and four I procrastinate. And yet . . . suppose that this merely means that to procrastinate is more natural to me, and that decisiveness by day is only play-acting? Of course it may be so.

It is a nice point to settle at what moment of the day our vision is clearest, our judgment least impaired. During and after meals we are assuredly not at our most scientifically well-balanced; when we are tired we are judicially below par too, and when we are boisterously well, may we not be a little mentally too optimistic? When, then, is our judgment at its best? Perhaps never or—again—perhaps between three and four? Heaven help us if that is so!

## THE VENUS OF CYRENE[1]

BEFORE leaving Caparetto I should like to indulge myself by recalling an incident which occurred at the hospitable officers' mess to which we were invited to dine on our last evening there. It has nothing to do with the work of the Red Cross, but it is so bound up with my memories of that work and of the kindly Italian officers who entertained us, of whom this Alpine mess may stand as a symbol, that I really must be permitted to break the narrative in order to tell it. For such meals were an integral part of our pilgrimage. Never shall I forget our many hosts—the heartiness of their welcome, the heartiness of their eating, their sparkling merry eyes as they chaffed each other; and I had the silent observer's exceptional opportunity to see and absorb these things.

To get the story right we must go back to the fifth century A.D., when an unknown Greek sculptor made an unknown and beautiful woman his model for one of the loveliest statues in the world, two photographs of which are on my table as I write. After obscurity and vicissitude, during which the

[1] From *Outposts of Mercy* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

figure lost her head, arms, and other accessories, it was discovered in Tripoli in the early nineteen-hundreds, in due course taken to Rome and, under the title 'The Venus of Cyrene,' set in a place of honour in the Thermæ of Diocletian. There I had seen her for the first time a few weeks earlier; after that to visit her again and again and again during my stay.

For there is nothing like it. The Venus of Cyrene has not the superb dignity and calm superhuman aloofness of the Venus of Milo, but she has a charm that in its way is as wonderful, and in no other statue that I have seen has the sculptor come so near to the miracle of turning flesh to stone or stone to flesh. For all its fifteen hundred years of age, there is a sensitiveness about this marble which goes beyond anything that these eyes have rested upon.

Now and then, as every one has of course noticed, chance plays into one's hands in such a way as to promote a friendliness or understanding more complete and swift than anything that could have been brought about by intention or design, whether in words or action, and this is what occurred to me in that extemporized dining-saloon amid the snow on that exceedingly chilly night. As always happened at our luncheons or dinners with this staff or that, Lord Monson was put on one side of the commanding officer and I on the other. Lord Monson, speaking Italian not much less fluently than English, and very

acceptably to Italians, did the talking, while I, who am no linguist and never shall be, either said nothing and passed the Chianti or, where French was understood, contrived to exchange a remark or so. On this particular evening the host, who, by the way, had known long and distinguished service in Tripoli, had plenty of French ; but since he was more of a soldier than a conversationalist, there were several silent pauses, particularly when Lord Monson was engaged by the officer on the other side of him.

It was during one such pause that chance came to my aid in the most astonishing way ; for, without any premeditation whatever, but merely expressing aloud a thought which a few minutes' general conversation on Rome had suggested to my mind, I said to the general that the first thing that I intended to do on reaching the Eternal City again, next week, was to pay another visit to the most lovely thing it contained—the Venus of Cyrene.

Never was speech so much the export of a clear sky, yet never could a pronouncement have been more opportune or electric. At these very ordinary words the general's somewhat stern military features relaxed and a moisture of enthusiasm dimmed his eyes. Then he spoke. 'I,' he said, 'it was I who discovered that statue ! '

Could anything have been better ? Instantly we were intimate where we had been so formal, and in the excitement of the moment I did what I have

never done before with a person so illustrious, and shall probably never do again—I clapped my hand on his shoulder. The mess shivered and turned pale ; but I couldn't help it, so momentous did it seem to meet such a man. Under ordinary conditions I should, for taking such a liberty, no doubt have been ordered out and shot ; but the freemasonry of enthusiasm, the sacred laws of hospitality, or Venus herself, saved me.

# THE OLDEST JOKE[1]

MANY investigators have speculated as to the character of the first joke; and as speculation must our efforts remain. But I personally have no doubt whatever as to the subject-matter of that distant pleasantry: it was the face of the other person involved. I don't say that Adam was caustic about Eve's face or Eve about Adam's: that is improbable. Nor does matrimonial invective even now ordinarily take this form. But after a while, after cousins had come into the world, the facial jest began; and by the time of Noah and his sons the riot was in full swing. In every rough and tumble among the children of Ham, Shem, and Japheth, I feel certain that crude and candid personalities fell to the lot, at any rate, of the little Shems.

So was it then; so is it still to-day. No jests are so rich as those that bear upon the unloveliness of features not our own. The tiniest street urchins in dispute always—sooner or later—devote their retorts to the distressing physiognomy of the foe. Not only are they conforming to the ancient convention, but they show sagacity too, for to sum up an opponent as 'Face,' 'Facey,' or 'Funny Face,' is to spike his gun. There is no reply but the cowardly *tu quoque*.

[1] From *A Boswell of Baghdad* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

He cannot say, 'My face is not comic, it is handsome'; because that does not touch the root of the matter. The root of the matter is your opinion of his face as deplorable.

Not only is the recognition of what is odd in an opponent's countenance of this priceless value in ordinary quarrels among the young and the ill-mannered (just as abuse of the opposing counsel is the best way of covering the poverty of one's own case at law), but the music-hall humorist has no easier or surer road to the risibilities of most of his audience. Jokes about faces never fail, and are never threadbare. Sometimes I find myself listening to one who has been called—possibly the label was self-imposed—the Prime Minister of Mirth, and he invariably enlarges upon the quaintness of somebody's features, often, for he is the soul of impartiality, his own; and the first time, now thirty years ago, that I ever entered a music-hall (the tiny stuffy old Oxford at Brighton, where the chairman with the dyed hair—it was more purple than black—used to sit amid a little company of bloods whose proud privilege it was to pay for his refreshment), another George, whose surname was Beauchamp, was singing about a siren into whose clutches he had or had not fallen, who had

> an indiarubber lip
> Like the rudder of a ship.

—So you see there is complete continuity.

But the best example of this branch of humour is beyond all question that of the Two Macs, whose influence, long though it is since they eclipsed the gaiety of the nation by vanishing, is still potent. Though gone they still jest; or, at any rate, their jests did not all vanish with them: the incorrigible veneration for what is antique displayed by low comedians takes care of that. 'I saw your wife at the masked ball last night,' the first Mac would say, in his rich brogue. 'My wife was at the ball last night,' the other would reply in a brogue of deeper richness, 'but it wasn't a masked ball.' The first Mac would then express an overwhelming surprise, as he countered with the devastating question, 'Was *that* her face?'

'You're not two-faced, anyway. I'll say that for you,' was the apparently magnanimous concession made by one comedian to another in a recent farcical play. The other was beginning to express his gratification when the speaker continued: 'If you were, you wouldn't have come out with that one.' Again, you observe, there is no answer to this kind of attack. Hence, I suppose, its popularity. And yet, perhaps, to take refuge in a smug sententiousness, and remark crisply, 'Handsome is as handsome does,' should now and then be useful. But it requires some self-esteem.

There is no absolute need, however, for the face joke to be applied to others to be successful. Since,

in spite of the complexion creams, 'plumpers,' and nose-machines advertised in the papers, faces will continue to be here and there somewhat Gothic, the wise thing for their owners is to accept them and think of other things, or console themselves before the unflattering mirror with the memory of those mortals who have been both quaint-looking and gifted. Wiser still perhaps to make a little capital out of the affliction. Public men who are able to make a jest of the homeliness of their features never lose by it. President Wilson's public recital of the famous lines on his countenance (which I personally find not impossibly unprepossessing) did much to increase his popularity.

> As a beauty I am not a star,
> There are others more handsome by far.
> But my face, I don't mind it,
> For I keep behind it;
> It's the people in front get the jar.

And an English bishop, or possibly dean, came, at last, very near earth when in a secular address he repeated his retort to the lady who had commented upon his extraordinary plainness: 'Ah, but you should see my brother.' There is also the excellent story of the ugly man before the camera, who was promised by the photographer that he should have justice done to him. 'Justice!' he exclaimed. 'I don't want justice; I want mercy.'

The great face joke, as I say, obviously came first.

Because there were in the early days none of the materials for the other staple quips—such as alcohol, and sausages, and wives' mothers. Faces, however, were always there. And not even yet have the later substitutes ousted it. Just as Shakespeare's orator, 'when he is out,' spits, so does the funny man, in similar difficulties, if he is wise, say, 'Do you call that a face?' and thus collect his thoughts for fresh sallies. If all 'dials' were identical, Mr. George Graves, for example, would be a stage bankrupt; for, resourceful as he is in the humour of quizzical disapproval, the vagaries of facial oddity are his foundation stone.

Remarkable as are the heights of grotesque simile to which all the Georges have risen in this direction, it is, oddly enough, to the other and gentler sex that the classic examples (in my experience) belong. At a dinner-party given by a certain hospitable lady who remained something of an *enfant terrible* to the end of her long life, she drew the attention of one of her guests, by no means too cautiously, to the features of another guest, a bishop of great renown. 'Isn't his face,' she asked, in a deathless sentence, 'like the inside of an elephant's foot?' I have not personally the honour of this divine's acquaintance, but all my friends who have met or seen him assure me that the similitude is exact. Another lady, happily still living, said of the face of an acquaintance, that it was 'not so much a face, as a part of her

person which she happened to leave uncovered, by which her friends were able to recognize her.' A third, famous for her swift analyses, said that a certain would-be beauty might have a title to good looks but for 'a rush of teeth to the head.' I do not quote these admirable remarks merely as a proof of woman's natural kindliness, but to show how even among the elect—for all three speakers are of more than common culture—the face joke holds sway.

## TWO OF MARTHA'S SONS[1]

MR. KIPLING, dividing, in that fine poem, men into the Sons of Martha and the Sons of Mary—the Sons of Martha being the servants and the sons of Mary the served—characteristically lays his emphasis on those who make machinery to move. Thus :

The Sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part,
But the Sons of Martha favour their Mother of the careful soul and the troubled heart ;
And because she lost her temper once, and because she was rude to the Lord her Guest,
Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons, world without end, reprieve or rest.

It is their care, in all the ages, to take the buffet and cushion the shock.
It is their care that the gear engages—it is their care that the switches lock.
It is their care that the wheels run truly—it is their care to embark and entrain,
Tally, transport, and deliver duly the Sons of Mary by land and main.

Mr. Kipling, as I say, is thinking more of highly trained and efficient operatives than of the quieter ministrants ; but, after all, some of Mary's Sons

[1] From *'Twixt Eagle and Dove* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

—possibly the majority of them—stay at home and refrain from running the Empire, and these too count upon their cousins for assistance.

A very large number of Martha's Sons, for example, become waiters; and waiters are a race to whom insufficient justice has been done by men of letters. There should be a Book of Waiters, as there was a Book of Doctors and a Book of Lawyers, by the late Cordy Jeaffreson, and a Book of the Table, by the late Dr. Doran. Old waiters for choice: men who have mellowed in their calling; men who have tasted wines for themselves and studied human nature when it eats and is vulnerable. I wish somebody would compile it. It should be a cosmopolitan work: England's old waiters must be there, and France's, upon whom most clubmen of any age ought to be able to enlarge fruitily. In fact, all well-stored Bohemian memories in London and Paris should yield much. And Ireland's old waiters most conspicuously must be there; but whoever is to write this book must hasten to collect the material, for in Ireland, I am told, the old waiter is vanishing. An elderly Irish gentleman with whom I was talking recently—or, rather, to whom I was listening as he searched his memory for drolleries of the past—said that the disappearance, under modern conditions, of the old humorous independent waiters of his earlier day is the one which he personally most regretted. No longer, said he are to be found,

except very occasionally, these worthy friends of the traveller—Martha's Sons at their best, or, at any rate, at their most needed. Slow they may have been, not always strictly sober, and often despotic; but they were to be counted upon as landmarks: they extended a welcome, they fed the hungry (in time), they slaked the thirsty (more quickly), and they made remarks amusing enough to fortify their good points and palliate their bad. 'There was an old fellow named Terence at Limerick,' said my friend, and there followed two or three characteristic anecdotes of old Terence at Limerick. 'There was old Tim at Tralee,' and he painted old Tim for me in a few soft strokes—red nose, creaking legs, and all. What though his nose was red and his legs creaked, Tralee is no longer worth visiting, because Tim is not there. That was the burden of the lament. These old fellows have passed, and the new waiters, most of whom are foreigners or girls, can never mature into anything comparable with them.

Two of my friend's stories I may tell. One is of old Denis at Mallow, who on being asked if the light in the coffee-room could not be made brighter, said, in that charming definitive Irish way, that it could not—the repetition of the negative being so much more final than our English utterance of the word 'no,' just as the avoidance of the word 'yes,' in favour of the affirmative 'I will,' is, in Ireland, so

pleasant a change to the English ear. 'Is it always like this?' my friend then inquired. 'It is not, sorr,' said old Dennis; 'it is often worse.' Not a great anecdote, but you must brave the horrors of St. George's Channel to meet with these alluring unexpectednesses of speech. Imagine an English waiter thus surprising one! The other story is of old Florence, head waiter at a certain Irish yacht club. Some sojourners in the neighbourhood, having been elected honorary members for the period of their visit, asked a few American friends to dine there, and then, even while in the boat on their way to dinner, suddenly realized that honorary members are entitled to no such privileges. It was decided to put the case to old Florence. 'Have you a rule against honorary members inviting guests?' 'We have, sorr,' said he. 'Is it very strictly enforced? I mean, would there be any risk in breaking it?' 'There would not, sorr. The only rule in this club that is never broken, sorr, is the one which forbids gratuities to be given to the waiters.'

For those Sons of Martha who make their living—and not a bad one—by ministering to their hungry fellow-creatures there is no call to feel sorry. They are often not only richer but happier than their customers, and when the time comes they retire to snug little houses (of which they not infrequently own a row) with a competence, and pass the evening of life with their pipe and glass, their friends and

grandchildren, moving serenely, if perhaps with a shade too plantigrade a step (the waiters' heritage), to the grave. No call, as I say, to feel sorry for them ; but what of those other Sons of Martha, the railway porters, who while helping us to travel and get away from home never travel or get away from home themselves, and for ever are carrying or wheeling heavy trunks or searching for visionary cabs ?

The mere fact of never having a holiday is not in itself distressing. Holidays often are overrated disturbances of routine, costly and uncomfortable, and they usually need another holiday to correct their ravages. Men who take no holidays must not, therefore, necessarily become objects of our pity. But I confess to feeling sorry for those servants of the public who apparently not only never take a holiday themselves, but who spend all their lives in assisting others to get away.

It is probably no privation to a bathing-machine man never to enter the sea ; uproariously happy in that element as his clients can be, their pleasure, in which he has no share, does not, I imagine, embitter his existence. Similarly, since a waiter either has eaten or is soon to eat, we need not waste sympathy on his unending task of setting seductive dishes before others. But it is conceivable that some of those weary and dejected men whom one sees at Victoria, for example, in the summer, eternally making an effort, however unsuccessful, to cope with

the exodus of Londoners to the south coast, really would like also to repose on Brighton beach. But no. Their destiny is for ever to help others to that paradise, and remain at Victoria themselves. Just as Moses was denied the Children of Israel's Promised Land, so are the porters. The engine-driver can go, the stoker can go, the guard can go—indeed, they must go—but the porters get no nearer than the carriage doors and then wheel back again. And if the plight of the porters at Victoria is unenviable, think of that of the porters at the big termini on the other side of London when they read the labels on the luggage which they handle !—labels for the west, for the land of King Arthur ; labels for the north, for delectable Highland retreats ; labels for Northumberland and Yorkshire ; labels for the east coast ; labels for Kerry and Galway and Connemara.

# THE LITERATURE OF ADVERTISEMENTS

IT would be interesting to be told how many poets, in their condescending days, have written verses for advertisers. Lamb, we know, was guilty of lottery puffs ; and it would probably have amused him to rhyme up other wares so long as he could put the rewards into folios, old plays or the materials of conviviality. Byron, in *Don Juan*, gave Macassar oil a tremendous puff. That was gratuitous ; but probably he was the recipient of commercial overtures too, even though he was a lord, and a high-mettled one at that. Advertisers have never feared to approach. And I wonder if Byron's biographer, Tom Moore, ever wrote any of this kind of verse. There is nothing in his published verse to make the idea impossible. Byron, as it happens, was not long ago posthumously pressed into the service of a weekly paper, with rather unfortunate results : a quatrain of his being used on the cover, nominally to praise, but in reality doing something very different. 'The world is a bundle of hay' (his Lordship wrote) : 'Mankind are the asses that pull. Each tugs it a different way : and the greatest of all is John Bull.' After the lapse of years it was decided by Mr.

Bottomley that to call his paper an ass was not the most adroit of measures, and he has now adopted another motto.

It appears to me that the metrical recommendation of articles of merchandise, not excluding tobacco, is on the increase. At any rate, I seldom pick up a paper that does not contain some such effusion; not too rigorously planned either, and often with such rhymes as 'Bismillah,' say, and 'thriller.' But the new advertisement verse seems to lack concentration. Nothing done in this way for a long while can compare with the classic example put forth by a firm of nib makers; but that indeed is more than an advertisement, it is probably the best-known short poem in the world. Who wrote it? What genius constructed the first line:

They come as a boon and a blessing to men?

Perhaps Messrs. Macniven and Cameron could tell us.

Ingenious, although too diffuse, as many of the current examples are, I have just alighted, in a collection of newspaper cuttings of the 1820's, on a much more entertaining effort. Those were the days when Warren was building up a solid structure of fame for his blacking, and he was very much alive to the merits of poesy as an aid. I have seen other verses dedicated to the popularity of his commodity, but none so good as those that follow:

### THE GLASS REPLACED

From Warren's fam'd shop in the Strand, No. 30,
A bottle of blacking I bought,
To polish my boots all bespatter'd and dirty,
And scarce could believe the rich polish it brought.

Says I, 'Every blacking on earth it surpasses;
The leather is free from a crack;
My face I behold as in two looking-glasses,
No ebony inkstand was ever so black.'

The longer I gaz'd still the greater I wondered,
So bright were the rays of my boot:
My sister approached, as thus musing I pondered;
I knew she was vexed by the tread of her foot.

Her eyes sparkled rage, her vexation expressing,
She sat herself down ere she spoke.
At length she exclaimed, 'While my hair I was dressing,
My dressing-glass fell on the floor and was broke.'

Then I bid her be cool and to cease her repining;
She gave me a tender salute,
Her arm on my shoulder with fondness reclining,
She saw her dear image distinct in my boot.

She smiling replied, 'My dear brother, believe me,
No longer for glasses I 'll fret;
At once from expense and from fear you relieve me—
No glass can be equal to Warren's bright jet.'

Who wrote those lines? Not impossibly, I think, Theodore Hook, one of whose happiest witticisms is associated with the same article. Some one having begun to write the name of it in chalk on a wall,

being interrupted, had broken off at 'Warren's B.' 'The rest,' said Hook, 'is lacking.'

The verses I have quoted interest not only by their grave absurdity, but by the choice of their *dramatis personæ*. A whimsical bard of the present day might conceivably do something in the same manner, but nothing would induce him to make the heroine a sister. Sisters have ceased to be of any advertising value: unless they are the sisters of other people.

But the advertising of the moment that is most noticeable is remarkable not for verse, but for prose. And to a certain extent we know who are the authors. There is, for example, a system of mnemonics whose merits are not precisely a secret, the extollers of which are men all more or less of public note. Callisthenes, it is true, still hides beneath her pseudonym—I say her because on the cover of a collection of her essays (they have been collected) I discerned her very feminine lineaments. And so does the gentleman or lady who under the *nom de guerre* of Palladea finds so much more that is perfect in the performances at the Palladium than most of us can. But for Callisthenes, who was really an innovator in a world largely given to groove-dwelling, Palladea would, I fancy, never have existed, nor would the professional adulators of other establishments, none of whom can be accused of wishing the profits to be anywhere, so to speak, but in their own particular countries. The sincerest form of flattery has indeed

been too much practised; by all but the witty tailor, whose line is wholly his own, and who says 'Take it or leave it,' with so many entertaining variations. The bad time will come when he too has his imitators.

## OF BAREHEADEDNESS [1]

THE motto on the play-bill of a recent comedy stated that kings and queens have five fingers on each hand, take their meals regularly, and are, in short, the same as other people. But it is not true. No amount of such assurance will make kings the same as other people, because they are not. And the reason they are not the same is that they are different. I have just seen some of the difference.

I was leaving a London terminus, and, being with an invalid, I was travelling in a reserved compartment. Under the influence of well-directed silver bullets, porters had been skipping about in ecstasies of servility, and I was beginning to think myself almost one of the governing classes, when I observed two stationmaster persons in frock-coats and tall hats take their stand expectantly just by our carriage window ; and one of our serfs came back importantly to inform us that a certain member of the royal house of England was travelling by the same train, and, in fact, would graciously occupy the very next compartment. Unhappily, however, this compart-

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

ment was not on the engine side of ours, but on the other, so that although the presence of a traveller so august guaranteed a certain measure of safety, it could not absolutely eliminate risk for ourselves in the event of a collision, as it would, of course, have done had the salt of the earth been nearer the engine than we. Our assurance was limited to the knowledge that if a collision should occur its force would expend itself by the time our compartment was reached. We should be the ultimate victims. None the less it was comforting to be so near the Rose. Not the Rose itself, I must admit; nor even the Rose's consort. That much I may say, but beyond that I do not intend to divulge anything, merely remarking that though not a sovereign herself, there would be a different Kaiser in one country and a different queen in another had the lady who was about to take her seat in the next compartment possessed neither nephew nor daughter.

Well, suddenly a magnificent motor-car—so long and silent and luxurious that I marvelled at its occupants ever exchanging its warmth and security for a draughty terminus and a noisy railway train—drew up opposite our windows, and in a flash all headgear was off—the two stationmaster persons' tall hats, the chauffeur's and the footman's caps, and the bowler of the tall deferential aristocratic gentleman who emerged from the car and helped the royal lady and her companion to alight. With the

exception of the chauffeur and the footman, all, I may note, were partly bald. Then came a blossoming of courtesies on the part of the officials and acknowledgment of them by the visitors; nods and becks and wreathed smiles were exchanged; hands were even shaken; the royalty and her friend were ushered to their seats; the tall gentleman-in-waiting, who combined with the tactful aloofness of an undertaker the fluent ease of a diplomat and the authority of a commander, said a word or two to the railway representatives with a gay laugh, and disappeared into his own compartment, where doubtless he would kindle an expensive cigar; final salutations; and the train started, and heads once more were covered. Never had I occupied a private box so near the stage before.

And at our destination, which, as it chanced, was theirs too, we had all the comedy again, only here, in the provinces, there was a touch of gaucherie to help it. The Mayor was on the platform, hat in hand; near him were the chief constable and the stationmaster; and all were already bareheaded when the train drew up, and had perhaps been so for hours—the engine-driver being carefully instructed to operate his brakes to bring the royal compartment (and incidentally ours) abreast the welcome. All the members of the reception committee were again either bald or partly bald, so that I began to wonder if royalty's eyes ever alight upon a well-afforested

head at all; and all received a gracious handshake. And again, having swiftly alighted from the train, here was the tall gentleman-in-waiting, hat in hand, a little rebuking to the Mayor by reason of his bowler, while his worship still clung to the steadily obsolescing topper. And so, in another storm of courtesies and acknowledgments, the royal lady drove off in the Mayor's carriage, and, a normal atmosphere having asserted itself, we plebeians were at liberty to descend.

But how can any dramatist pretend that kings and queens are the same as other people? And how, indeed, could they be the same, even if they wished, with all this ceremony of bare heads to set them back again in their place? For no one could stand it. In a very few days' time any man's character would, if all heads were bared directly he appeared, show signs of change. If one would remain ordinary and like unto the majority of one's kind, one must now and then be in the presence of a hat. To see nothing but scalps, whether or not covered with hair, indoors and out, cannot but make life artificial and rarefied. People in this position, with such an unvaried prospect, can never be like anybody else, no matter how regularly they take their meals or how normal their hands may be.

## THE BEST STORIES [1]

I WAS reading the other day that that most amusing of clerks in holy orders, who writes Irish farcical stories over the pseudonym 'G. A. Birmingham,' but is known to the angels as Canon Hannay, has given it as his opinion that the best funny thing ever said is Charles Lamb's reply to the doctor who recommended him to take a walk on an empty stomach. 'Whose?' inquired Lamb. That certainly is among the best of the comic remarks of the world; but why does Canon Hannay put it down to Lamb? All my life I have been associating it with another humorous clerk in holy orders, and also a canon, the Rev. Sydney Smith, and it is to be found in every collection of his good sayings. Canon Hannay, who is normally so eager to give the Church even more than her due—for did he not create out of 'J. J.' the curate a super-magazine-hero, blending Sherlock Holmes, Captain Kettle, and Terence Mulvaney in one?—Canon Hannay, one would think, would have naturally allotted Sydney Smith everything. Moreover, the joke is more in Sydney Smith's way than in Lamb's; not because

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

Lamb was not expert at that peculiar variety of nonsense, but because Lamb had a passion for walking, and rarely, I should say, suffered from any malady needing this particular remedy; whereas the witty canon was a diner-out, addicted to gout and other table afflictions, and a walk on an empty stomach would probably have done him a world of good.

And now I lay aside my pen for a few moments in order to wonder what my own favourite story is, and have the usual difficulty in remembering any stories at all. Searching my memory, I find that Lamb comes up first, which is not unnatural, for in the stories which most appeal to me there must be irresponsibility rather than malice. Malice is easier, for one thing, and the laughter it causes is of an inferior quality. That touch of gay nonsense which Lamb had, and Sydney Smith had, is worth (to me) all the brilliant bitternesses. This time, too, it is authentic Lamb, and not Brummagem. My momentary choice is Lamb's reply to the reproach of his India House superior, 'You always come late to the office.' 'Yes, but see how early I leave!' That could not easily be beaten.

Lamb, however, did not consider that his best thing. We have it on evidence that he thought his not too kindly remark to his friend Hume on the size of Hume's family his best joke; but I, for one, do not agree with him. Hume, it seems, was the father

of a numerous brood, and he happened once to be so ill-advised as to mention his paternal achievement, apparently with pride, in Lamb's presence. 'One fool,' quoted Lamb, 'makes many.' Personally, I don't much esteem this story, not only because it is a score off a simple creature, and a rather too facile one at that, but also because it comes into the category of those sayings which the joker must himself have reported, or which the recipient of the witticism could not well report except resentfully. We can imagine the auditor of the priceless reply, 'But see how early I leave,' after recovering from the stunned condition into which its tremendous irrelevance knocked him, hurrying away in perplexity to report it in all its incredibleness to fellow-officials: 'What on earth do you think that that mad creature Lamb has just said to me?' and so on. But one does not see Hume hastening round to spread that family joke. Lamb, or another, must have done it.

Similarly, when the Austrian journalist Saphir, who said so many witty things, met an enemy in a narrow passage, and on the enemy remarking, 'I 'll not make way to let a fool pass,' pressed himself against the wall, saying, 'But I will,' it must have been Saphir who took the glad tidings round Vienna. A man, said Lamb (and proved it, too), may laugh at his own joke; but I think we always rather prefer that it should first get into currency by the other fellow's agency.

And yet, if that rule were strictly followed we should lose too many good things, for your true humorist scatters his jewels indiscriminately, and does not reserve them for the fitting ear.

Sir Walter Raleigh (I mean not the explorer but the longest knight) has pointed out that the reason why we have comparatively so few records of Lamb's jokes is that he made them to simple people, who either did not understand how good they were, or were not in the way of quoting them. As a friend of mine, who does something in a waggish line himself, remarked sadly to me the other day: 'I am always saying the right thing to the wrong people. Some one asked me the other day if I had known William Sharp. "No," I said, "but I once met Wilfrid Blunt," and instead of laughing, my friend began to talk seriously of the *Sonnets of Proteus*. I have no luck. The fact is that what all wits need is a Boswell. Without a Boswell it is necessary, if they are to be reported, that they must either themselves publish their good things or keep on repeating them until the right listener hears and notes them. Had there been a Boswell for Lamb. . . . But Lamb could not have endured one.

Having reached that point in this discussion, I sallied forth to the haunts of men to collect other opinions as to the best story. One of them at once gave Sydney Smith's reply to the little girl who was stroking the tortoise's shell, 'because the tortoise

liked it.' 'As well stroke the dome of St. Paul's,' said Sydney, 'to please the Dean and Chapter.' A second choice shakes me seriously in my own selection, for it ranks high indeed among the great anecdotes. Sam Lewis, the money-lender, was, at Monte Carlo, a regular habitué of the Casino. One day he bade every one farewell. 'I shan't see you for a fortnight or so,' he said; 'I 'm off to Rome.' Rome?' they inquired in astonishment. 'Yes. I 'm told it 's wonderful.' Two or three nights later he was back in his seat at the gambling table. 'But what about Rome?' his friends asked. 'You can 'ave Rome,' said Sam.

A third offered an historic dialogue from the Lobby. It seemed that an M.P., whom we will call X., somewhat elevated by alcohol, insulted another M.P., whom we will call Y., as he passed through that sacred apartment, by calling him 'a —— fool.' Y., stopping, said severely and pityingly, 'X., you 're drunk. I shall take no notice of what you say.' 'I know I 'm drunk,' replied X., 'but *I* shall be all right to-morrow. You 're *always* a —— fool.'

Since writing the last paragraph I have asked two more friends for their favourite stories. One of them at once gave me Whistler's comment on reading in the *Reminiscences* of W. P. Frith, R.A., painter of 'The Derby Day,' that as a youth it was a toss-up which he became: an auctioneer or an artist. 'He must have tossed up,' said Whistler. The other

choice was American and more cynical. A man's wife had died, and on the morning of the funeral the man was found sitting on his doorstep whistling gaily as he whittled a stick. One of the mourners remonstrated. It was most unseemly, he pointed out, that the widower should be thus employed on the day on which they were bearing to her last resting-place the remains of a woman so beautiful in person and in character—a faithful wife, a fond mother, an inspiration and model to the neighbourhood. 'Don't you realize that she was all this?' the scandalized guest inquired. 'Oh yes,' said the husband, 'but—I didn't like her.'

Apropos of Whistler, an artist friend who knew both that delicate Ishmaelite and George Du Maurier, tells me a story of the two which has not, I believe, ever seen print, and is unusual because Whistler is worsted in it. It seems that the great Impressionist was once developing, to a number of painters, some revolutionary theory or paradox with his customary arrogance and certainty. 'I 'm not arguing with you; I 'm telling you,' he said, after an interruption. 'Yes,' was Du Maurier's comment, 'but you forget we 're not the Horse Marines.'

And now, having set down all these examples, I remember what probably is the best good thing of all. For, as every one knows, there is some malign fate which has provided that one's memory shall always be a little late when the best stories are being

swapped. But better late than never. Dumas père, it may not be generally known, had African blood. He also was the father (like the great Sheridan) of a witty son. Said Dumas fils one day, of his sublime sire: 'My father is so vain and ostentatious that he is capable of riding behind his own carriage to persuade people that he keeps a black servant.' Having recalled that of Dumas fils, here is the best story that I know of Dumas père. Perhaps it is as good a story as has ever been told of any egoist. Coming away from dinner at a house noted for its dullness, he was asked by some one if he had not been dreadfully bored. 'I should have been,' he replied, 'if *I* hadn't been there.'

But of course these are not the best stories. Another day's memory would yield far better ones.

# THE FIRST ZEPPELIN OVER LONDON [1]

## Richard Haven to Dr. Sutherland, September 1915

DEAR SUTHERLAND,—I must tell you about the Zeppelins—or 'them nasty Zepps,' as my office charwoman calls them, her attitude to the Germans and their perils being very much what it is to beetles and mice.

It was on Wednesday night and I was just leaving the Temple, where I had been colloguing, at about 9.30, when suddenly what I supposed to be the gun on the Embankment went off, and looking up I saw that impossible London sight—a shell bursting in the air. Then another and another, while people appeared from nowhere and voices began to cry, 'They 're here! They 're here!' By this time the shafts of the searchlights were busy too, and I began to be aware of a glare in the sky over the city. Meanwhile the bangs and bursting shells went on. 'This is history, if you like,' I said to myself, and possibly to others, for under the influence of such an outrage every one is one's friend. To think that I

[1] A letter censored out of *The Vermilion Box.*

should have lived to see shells bursting over London. That is, however, all I could see, although 'There it is! There it is!' men were saying excitedly all round me, until, in Bouverie Street, one of those friendly strangers, whose eyes are always so much better than one's own, pointed out to me the Thing itself—a gleaming silvery grey body, about the size of a torpedo, moving stealthily away due north, far above the highest shell. There was something thrilling in the disdain of its progress; one could not withhold admiration from the commander of such an enterprise.

After a few seconds, during which it was in full view, it was lost behind the roofs on the north side of Fleet Street, and wishing to see all I could, I dashed into a big hotel there, hoping to get to a top window. But there were obstacles.

'Impossible,' said the boots, 'without the manager's permission.'

'Then fetch the manager.'

'I can't: he 's in the cellar.'

So I dashed out again and into Fetter Lane, and there I had another few seconds' glimpse of the monster. The shells were still pursuing it, and one that seemed to be really near won a round of applause from the little crowd; and that again struck me as odd. To think that I should have lived not only to see shells burst over London but to hear men clap their hands at them. It was nearer than the Zep-

pelin liked, I fancy, for at that moment she threw out a cloud of dense vapour or smoke, amidst which she probably changed her course, for I saw her no more.

Returning to Fleet Street I saw such a glow behind St. Paul's as made it impossible to do anything but seek the fire. The streets were comparatively empty, and I boarded a bus with only two other people on it. The conductor, of course, knew everything. The General Post Office, he said, had been destroyed, and Theobald's Road was being destroyed. But fortunately the Zeppelin had been hit by one of our guns and had fallen near King's Cross. So rapidly does false news travel!

I left him at St. Paul's, and hurrying through the churchyard found the Post Office intact but a gigantic conflagration in full swing off Wood Street. I have seen many London fires, but none so fierce and vast as this, and none so easy to watch, for the ordinary obstacles which the police put in one's way on such occasions were lacking. The crowd was very small and no one minded it. Nor have I seen a fire so beautiful as this; the flames having a peculiar golden quality and raging with a joyousness that added to an excitement that was already almost too intense. One had also the knowledge that the buildings being warehouses in a non-residential district, no lives were in danger.

While I was watching the flames some one touched

me on the arm and I found my journalist friend, Golder, beside me.

'Jolly fire, isn't it?' he said. 'But, do you know, I 've lost three guineas over this raid.'

'How 's that?' I asked him.

'Well,' he said, drawing a document from his pocket. 'Here 's an article I was posting to-night complaining that the Zeppelins will never succeed in getting to London! Damn the Germans!

'You can get it all back,' I said in my haste, 'by writing a description of this evening.'

'Good heavens!' he said, 'do you suppose the Censor will allow anything about this? Not a bit of it. This will resolve itself into a paragraph about the Eastern Counties.'

But it was not until we were coming away, after a quarter of an hour, that I knew how beautiful this fire really was; for then we saw its effect on St. Paul's. It was indescribably lovely. You know what a snow mountain is like when it flushes at sunrise and sunset? Well, St. Paul's was like that, only instead of glowing with a gentle steadiness, the light rippled and danced on it. The stone may be said to have burst into flower. I shall never forget it. That will be my St. Paul's evermore—a pulsating rose.

I walked home, and then for the first time began to be aware of the other side of these raids. So far I had been among only the sightseers and adventure-

hunters; I was now conscious of the distress which such visitations can cause. I heard in dark doorways sobs and soothing words; I came on hysterical groups of women, many only partly dressed, and crying children, and all night, it seems, they walked the streets in fear or huddled together under cover.

This afternoon I joined the crowds making the tour of the affected areas off Theobald's Road, where bombs fell. Street after street has not a pane of glass left, and glaziers should be millionaires. In Queen's Square a bomb fell absolutely in the middle of the garden. Every window is broken, and the shrapnel has made holes and gashes in the masonry of several houses; but that is all. At any rate, all that is visible. But who shall compute the shattered nerves among all the inhabitants of this very poor and crowded district? The official casualty returns take no account of those; they merely give killed and wounded.

So you see we are now properly in it, even in London's fair city.—Yours, R. H.

## CIVIL *v.* MILITARY

IN the third-class carriage there were already too many of us when the soldier came in. He was a tall handsome young fellow, with the prancing white horse of the West Kents on his cap, an aquiline nose, fair moustache, a scratch on his cheek, and a front tooth missing. Behind him, making far more disturbance in the packed smoking compartment even than his own extensive person, trailed his kit: rifle, knapsack, odds and ends of comforts from home—the chief of which, he told us, was salt—to take back with him (for although the War was over he was going back); other implements of warfare, and, above all, his helmet.

His apologies for overcrowding us would have constituted an introduction had one been necessary; but khaki—and especially so since the armistice—is a great federator, and those travellers near the door who offered to make room for him were on ntimate terms with him at once. Among these, sitting opposite, was a youngish man in civvies, who had had a good deal to say already on most matters of the day, from his experiences on the historic Armistice Day to the prospects of the General Election,

with a word or two on the surrender of the German fleet and his mortification that he was not there to see it. As a talker he was without charm, but he used a powerful eye with such skill that he compelled attention, all of us being cravens at heart.

The soldier, however, being at once lured on to talk by one of his neighbours, this other fount was, for the moment, dried.

Yes, the West Kent said, he was going back; at any rate his leave was up, and he was to report at Victoria. Didn't know for how long he might go or where he would be sent. Didn't much care now the killing was over—as he supposed it was. Had had two years of it out there, and that was enough. Only two 'leaves' in all that time.

Had he been hit? Not really. Not exactly. He laughed. He would show us. Here he reached for his helmet and displayed two holes where a bullet had entered and emerged. About three weeks ago. Thought he was a goner then. It half-stunned him for the moment. When he came to and felt something wet on his cheeks and discovered it was blood he said to himself, 'That settles it; Jerry 's got me at last.' But it was only the tiniest scratch from a splinter—see?—and he pointed out the mark on his cheek.

'That 's funny,' said the civilian talker with the powerful eye. 'A friend of mine had a bit of iron hit him during the last air-raid. We were walking

together, going from shelter to shelter, and the shells were bursting up above something terrible. I dare say '—this to the soldier—' you 've heard them.'

The West Kent indicated that he had.

' Ah, but not in an air-raid.'

No, the West Kent man had never been in London in an air-raid.

' I thought maybe you hadn't,' said the man with the eye. ' Well, I can tell you they were a bit thick. You saw some rum things then, I can tell you. I remember another of them—let 's see, when was it ? ' He went through some mnemonic system, corrected the result, re-corrected it, made an amendment or two and decided it was in September 1917. ' I was in all of them, you know,' he interjected, and raked the whole carriage with his commanding glance. ' Well, about that night——'

A momentary pause gave one of the bolder spirits among us a chance and he asked the West Kent what he was doing when the armistice was declared. He was at home on leave, he said. He 'd had a spell in the hospital. Not due to the bullet through the helmet, but to trench fever. He 'd come over suddenly all over lumps and, when he took his puttees off, his legs swelled up proper, and, oh, the irritation ! Made him weak too, and he fainted. Next thing he knew he was on a stretcher with a doctor looking at him. ' You 'll be all right to-morrow,' said the

doctor. Then he went to sleep again, and never woke up for hours and hours, and when he did wake he was well, except for a little shakiness.

'Shakiness? Ah!' said the youngish man with the eye. 'That 's what the air-raids used to do for people's nerves! Lummy, you should have seen how it took some of them! I remember on one night a big strong fellow running into the chube where I was with the tears streaming down his face. Something to remember, those air-raids, I can tell you.' He paused, but instantly began again. 'My home 's at Finsbury Park and there was a house within fifty yards of mine blown to bits. A falling bomb, you know.'

The soldier grunted out acquiescence; he knew.

'Some people were terrified, the eye continued; 'but others were just foolhardy. So long as you stayed indoors you were fairly safe, unless, of course' —he laughed mirthlessly—'your house copped it, like the one at Finsbury Park. You see, my opinion is that our own barrage did as much damage as the Huns' bombs. That 's always been my contention. We shall never know how many casualties were due to our own barrage.' Once more he paused a moment too long.

'So when I went before the doctor,' the soldier was beginning, when the train reached my station.

As I was closing the door behind me I realized that the eye had won again.

'Doctors!' he was saying. 'You should have tried to get a doctor in London the day after an air-raid!'

## AUNTIE

### I.—The White Elephant

MY DEAR BELLE,—You must make up your own mind about coming to stay here, but really I think you should forget your fears. The moon is getting quite tiny again, and we must all be fatalists, mustn't we? There is a room for you whenever you want it.

No news in particular. Frank is still a Special, and I see him only occasionally, but, although tired, he keeps very fit. He says that he deserves the O.B.E. because he has never yet forgotten to put a halfpenny stamp as well as a penny one on any letter, whereas we get understamped ones from other people by almost every post, and have to pay on them.

The children are fit, but there seems no chance of any sea for them this year, and we must do the best we can with the Botanical Gardens and the Round Pond, and now and then the Zoo.

Sooner or later I suppose Billy's tonsils must come out. What are tonsils for, anyway?

The great joke is Auntie, who, after experimenting

with all kinds of war-work, has now settled down as a saleswoman at a Gift House. She has done everything in her time. She has made swabs and bandages, sitting in the most cloistral headdress, or has read to soldiers and written letters for soldiers; she has tried to learn the typewriter, and tried to learn shorthand, and tried to learn to drive a car. But these three last accomplishments beat her, and now she is selling cast-off property in a great Gift House in Bayswater.

You know the idea. People send the things they don't want to these places and other people buy them, and the proceeds go to war charity. The most extraordinary thing is not that any one should now want them, but that any one should ever have wanted them; but I suppose they were wedding presents or what are called 'Seasonable Gifts.' All kinds of things under glass shades, for example. 'Art' things. Viennese vases.

One never realized so clearly the meaning of the saying, 'Tastes differ,' as when one goes there—as I often do, to see how Auntie is getting on. She thinks I go to cheer her up, and is full of gratitude: but really I go for my own amusement, because she is so funny. You know her passionate desire to be truthful. Always giving the other side the benefit of the doubt and all that. Well, that is not the best kind of mind for a good saleswoman, and if Auntie were in real trade she would starve. But for charity

she makes an effort to compromise, because it is for charity, although I have no doubt that she suffers for it when she is alone with her conscience afterwards.

This very afternoon I found her talking to a man who had taken a fancy to an earthenware negro, through whose anatomy an electric wire could be run to a lamp. Nothing more boring can be imagined in the way of parlour decoration ; but the man liked it. To Auntie it was, of course, a horror, but her duty was to extract money for the cause.

'That 's what I call quaint,' the man said—he looked like an inspector or rate collector. 'An amusing idea, don't you think ? '

Auntie swallowed and said it was very amusing.

'The wife would be tickled to death by it,' the man said.

'And the children ? ' Auntie suggested : rather cold-bloodedly I thought.

When they saw it, they would, the man agreed ; but he wasn't one for allowing young children in the drawing-room, where there were so many pretty things about.

'Not that this is exactly pretty,' he went on, 'but it 's quaint.'

Auntie affirmed that it was one of the quaintest things that they had had in the place.

'I wonder you don't buy it for yourself,' the man said.

This was a surprise attack, and Auntie bent under

it, but, quickly recovering, she said that her house was already too full. Nor, she added, would she like to deprive him of it.

'Well,' he said, 'I 'll think it over. I 'll look in again.'

Poor Auntie! This phrase, it appears, is the most dreaded of all by sellers of White Elephants. Their one mastering desire is to prevent people from thinking anything over.

'You had better take it now,' Auntie said, adding with an ingenuity that I shall never sufficiently admire, 'three or four other people have looked at it and may be back at any moment.'

The man examined it again.

'You 're sure it 's a good thing?' he asked. 'It 's clever?'

'I think it 's wonderful,' Auntie replied, 'wonderful. I never should have thought to see a negro so —so counterfeited. For those who like such things I think it 's amazing.

'I 'll have it,' said the man.

When he had gone with his treasure under his arm, Auntie and I had tea upstairs. She looked years older.

Do write the old dear a line saying you hear great things of her new work. And you had better come and stay with me and risk the Hun.—Yours always,

ISA.

## II.—The Oath

After many attempts and as many misgivings—perhaps indeed one more misgiving than attempt—Auntie obtained an appointment as an authorized helper of the American Red Cross in France, and was at last sufficiently furnished with the necessaries of that calling to be ready to leave.

If you knew Auntie you would understand what her friends have been through these last few weeks; but as you are so unfortunate as not to know the sweetest and gentlest creature on earth, and the most utterly lacking in any capacity for furthering her own interests, fighting for her own hand, feathering her own nest, or performing any of the other myriad self-protective acts—although tireless in her efforts for others' advancement and happiness and comfort—let me say that she is very small and fragile-looking, very liable to mistrust in herself, and so diffident and so unwilling to give trouble, that for a ruder spirit to go shopping with her, for example, is to suffer positive agony. Not the kind of helper needed in a war hospital, you might think; but there you would be wrong, for Auntie can be a lion for strength where duty is.

Anyway the day arrived when the ordeal of the passport office was to be endured, and I went with her to be of what assistance I could and prevent any final and irrevocable panic.

The ritual included, in addition to the usual signatures, a solemn declaration of acquiescence in a number of regulations drawn up for the guidance of all American Red Cross assistants. Auntie began to read it tremblingly; to the timid feminine eye so terribly formal was it and so threatening. Nothing was said about shooting at dawn, but obviously nothing less than that would be the destiny of any defaulter.

'But, my dear,' she said, 'supposing that one involuntarily did something wrong—something that would "give information to the enemy"? How dreadful that would be! It would undo all that I am wanting to do.'

I reassured her, but she read on in trepidation. And then suddenly she brightened.

'I must, of course,' she said, 'do my best; but, at any rate, I can put my name to this one with perfect confidence. I know I shall never transgress here, consciously or unconsciously,' and she pointed to the sixth clause on the paper:

'6. In no circumstances will I deliver a political or electioneering speech to the troops.'

## STRONGER THAN HERSELF

IN an assortment of nieces, totalling nine in all—but two of them, being still, in Sir WALTER'S phrase, composed of 'that species of pink dough which is called a fine infant,' do not count—I think that my favourites are Enid and Hannah. Enid being the daughter of a brother of mine, and Hannah of a sister, they are cousins. They are also collaborators in literature and joint editors of a magazine for family consumption entitled *The Attic Salt-Cellar*. The word 'Attic' refers to the situation of the editorial office, which is up a very perilous ladder, and 'salt-cellar' was a suggestion of my own, which, though adopted, is not yet understood.

During the search for pseudonyms for the staff—the pseudonym is an essential in home journalism, and the easiest way of securing it is to turn one's name round—we came upon the astonishing discovery that Hannah is exactly the same whether you spell it backwards or forwards. Hannah therefore calls herself, again at my suggestion, 'Pal,' which is short for 'palindrome.' We also discovered to her intense delight, that Enid, when reversed, makes 'Dine'—a pleasant word but a poor

pseudonym. She therefore calls herself, after her pet flower, ' Marigold.'

Between them Pal and Marigold do all the work. There is room for an epigram if you happen to have one about you, or even an ode, but they can get along without outside contributions. Enid does most of the writing and Hannah copies it out.

So much for prelude to the story of Enid's serial. Having observed that all the most popular periodicals have serial stories she decided that she must write one too. It was called ' The Prairie Lily,' and began splendidly. I give the list of characters at the head of the first instalment :

*The Duke of Week*, an angry father and member of the House of Lords.

*The Duchess of Week*, his wife, once famous for her beauty.

*Lady Lily*, their daughter, aged nineteen and very lovely.

*Mr. Ploot*, an American millionaire who loves the Lady Lily.

*Lord Eustace Vavasour*, the Lady Lily's cousin, who loves her.

*Jack Crawley*, a young farmer and the one that the Lady Lily loves.

*Fanny Starlight*, a poor relation and the Lady Lily's very closest friend.

*Webb*, the Lady Lily's maid.

Such were the characters when the story began, and at the end of the first instalment the author, with very great ingenuity—or perhaps with only a light-hearted disregard of probability—got the whole bunch of them on a liner going to America. The last sentence described the vessel gliding away from the dock, with the characters leaning over the side waving good-bye. Even Jack Crawley, the young farmer, was there ; but he was not waving with the others, because he did not want any one to know that he knew the Lady Lily, or was on board at all. Lord Eustace was on one side of the Lady Lily as she waved, and Mr. Ploot on the other, and they were, of course, consumed with jealousy of each other.

Having read the first instalment, with the author's eye fixed embarrassingly upon me, and the author giggling as she watched, I said that it was very interesting ; as indeed it was. I went on to ask what part of America they were all going to, and how it would end, and so on ; and Enid sketched the probable course of events, which included a duel for Lord Eustace and Mr. Ploot (who turned out to be not a millionaire at all, but a gentleman thief), and a very exciting time for the Lady Lily on a ranche in Texas, whither she had followed Jack Crawley, who was to become famous throughout the States as 'The Cowboy King.' I forget about the Duke and Duchess, but a lover was to be found on the ranche

for Fanny Starlight ; and Red Indians were to carry off Webb, who was to be rescued by the Cowboy King ; and so on. There were, in short, signs that Enid had not only read the feuilletons in the picture papers but had been to the Movies too. But no matter what had influenced her, the story promised well.

Judge then of my surprise when on opening the next number of *The Attic Salt-Cellar* I found that the instalment of the serial consisted only of the following :

THE PRAIRIE LILY

CHAPTER II

All went merrily on the good ship *Astarte* until the evening of the third day out, when it ran into another and larger ship and was sunk with all hands. No one was saved.

THE END.

' But, my dear,' I said, ' you can't write novels like that.'

' Why not, Uncle Dick ? ' Enid asked.

' Because it 's not playing the game,' I said. ' After arousing every one's interest and exciting us with the first chapter, you can't stop it all like this.'

' But it happened,' she replied. ' Ships often sink, Uncle Dick, and this one sank.'

' Well, that 's all right,' I said, ' but, my dear

child, why drown every one ? Why not let your own people be saved ? Not the Duke and Duchess, perhaps, but the others. Think of all those jolly things that were going to happen in Texas, and the duel, and——'

'Yes, I know,' she replied sadly. 'It 's horrid to have to give them up, but I couldn't help it. The ship would sink and no one was saved. I shall have to begin another.'

There 's a conscience for you ! There 's realism ! Enid should go far.

I have been wondering if there is any other writer of serial stories whose readers would not suffer much if similar visitations of inevitability came to him.

## OF SLANG—ENGLISH AND AMERICAN [1]

I WAS hearing the other day of a famous girls' school where slang is forbidden. A certain caprice, however, marks the embargo, for 'topping' is permitted although 'ripping' is on the black list. Personally I wish that at all schools slang of every kind was strictly discouraged, for it leads to the avoidance of any effort to be precise in speech; it tends to slovenliness. At lunch recently, for example, I sat next a young woman, a mother, who was telling me of her experiences in Venice. I asked her what she thought of that city of wonder. 'Topping,' she replied, and then added, thoughtfully, 'Topping.' Now I did not expect her to deliver a lecture on the charms of Venice and to give me an analysis of her many emotions on first seeing them, but I confess that I was looking for something a little more descriptive than the word she selected. There is no doubt that Venice is topping, but then so is the cooking at the Focus, and so is the new *revue* at the Futility, and so is the dress your cousin wore at her coming-out dance, and so is Miss Hieratica Bond's new novel.

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

The trouble with English slang is that it is seldom descriptive, seldom paints pictures, seldom contains an idea. Probably no word signifying excellence has been so much used as 'ripping,' but how does it come to mean that? 'Topping' one can derive: it savours of the top, the utmost, the highest, and has a correlative in 'top-hole.' But 'ripping'? No one could derive that. It has no independence.

American slang is interesting because it applies and illustrates. One recognizes its meaning in a flash of light. Somebody once contraverted the statement that America had no national poetry, by pointing to her slang; and he had reason. American slang very often is poetry, or an admirable substitute for it. It illuminates, synthesizes. In England we should fumble for hours to find a swift description of Sir Oliver Lodge; an American looks at him and says 'high-brow,' and it is done. I was talking a little while ago to the most mercurial and quick-witted comedian on our stage, who had but recently returned from America. Having made an allusion which I, in my slowness, did not at once apprehend, 'Ha!' he said, 'you 're on a freight train!' So I was. In other words, I was behind him in speed; he had employed a recent American phrase to explain delay in the uptake. Americans, however, being very thorough in their neologisms, passengers on freight trains have their chances too; and what I ought to have replied, while puzzling over

his first remark, was this: 'Snow again, kid. I missed your drift.'

Our slang, as I say, seldom describes. Thus, it is rich in terms suggestive of imbecility, but only one has any descriptive merit, and that is 'barmy,' which means, literally, frothy at the top, yeasty. 'Dotty,' 'up the pole,' 'cracked,' 'potty,' these are poor, and do not compare with the American 'batty' (an abbreviation of 'bats in the belfry') which, I believe, our cousins have recently 'side-tracked' for 'dippy,' an inferior word. English slang for the most part is adopted from whimsicality: it is used to give variety to speech, not to supply word-pictures. Fixed rules determine its manufacture, inversion being one of the most common. Thus, a boy arriving at school with the name of White would probably be called Blacky within twenty-four hours. Another rule is association. Thus a boy whose name was Marshall would be called Snelgrove. A third rule is abbreviation, which, operating upon association, would turn Snelgrove to Snell or Snelly in a week. And that would be the end: he would be Snelly for all time to his contemporaries.

On such lines does most English slang run—being rather a supplementary language than an alternative. When young Oxford suddenly began to substitute 'er' for the ordinary termination of a word, it was not making slang so much as diversifying and idiotizing conversation. Thus a bed-maker was transformed

to a ' bedder,' breakfast to ' brekker,' and the waste-paper basket, by a desperate effort, became the ' wagger pagger bagger '—to be subsequently surpassed when the Prince of Wales arrived at Magdalen, and was known as the ' Pragger Wagger ' : he who only a short time before, at Osborne, on the older principle of inversion, had been called ' Sardines.' I know a family lost to shame which substitutes the word ' horse ' for the last syllable of words, and thus removes gravity ; and another even more lost where the letter N fitfully takes the place of other initial consonants, so that ' a walk in the garden ' becomes ' a nalk in the narden,' also with risible results. But this is not slang. Slang is an alternative word not necessarily descriptive at all but as a rule stronger than the word whose place it takes.

Of all the exasperating forms of speech in which English street humorists indulge, there is none so strange as rhyming slang.

' How 's the bother and gawdfers ? ' I heard a porter in Covent Garden ask, by way of afterthought, loudly of a friend from whom he had just parted. ' They 're all right,' was the shouted reply ; and I went on my way in a state of bewilderment as to what they were talking about. What was a bother and what a gawdfer ? I could think of nothing except possibly some pet animal, or a nickname for a mutual friend. In a higher commercial rank they might have been gold mines. Among soldiers they

would have been officers. I asked a few acquaintances, but without any result, and so made a note of the sentence and dismissed it until the man who knows should arrive.

In course of time I found him.

'What are a bother and a gawdfer?' I asked.

'A wife and kid, of course,' he said. ('Of course!' Think of saying 'of course' there.)

I looked perplexed, and he added: 'Rhyming slang, you know. Wife is "bother and strife." Kids are "God forbids." And then, according to the rule, the rhyming word is eliminated and the other is the only one used'; and we settled down to discuss this curious development of language and the Londoner's mania for calling nothing by its right name.

When an American is asked a question for which he has no answer, and he says, 'Search me,' he is emphasizing in a striking and humorous way his total lack of information on that point. When he calls a very strong whisky 'Tangle-foot,' he indicates its peculiar properties in unmistakable fashion in the briefest possible terms. But when a Londoner asks another after his 'bother and gawdfers,' there may be a certain asinine funniness in the remark, but there is neither cleverness nor colour. He might as well have said 'wife and kids,' whereas, when Americans use a slang word, it is because it is better than the other word. In American slang every

phrase, like the advertisement pictures, 'tells a story.'

The silliness of rhyming slang is abysmal. Look at this sentence: 'So I took a flounder to the pope, laid my lump on the weeping, and did a plough.' That is quite a normal remark in any public bar. It means that the speaker went home in a cab and was quickly asleep. Why? Because a cab is a *flounder and dab*, one's home is the *Pope of Rome*, a head is a *lump of lead*, a pillow is a *weeping willow*, and to sleep is to *plough the deep*. A certain bibulous and quarrelsome peer was told by a cabman that he hadn't been 'first for a bubble.' It was probably only too true; but what do you think it meant? It meant that he hadn't been *First of October* for a *bubble and squeak*: reduced to essentials, sober for a week.

All this and more my friend told me. Here are some anatomical terms. The face is the *Chevy*, from *Chevy Chase*; the nose is *I suppose*, this being one of the cases where the whole phrase is always used; the brain is the *once again*, shortened to *once*; the eye is a *mince*, from *mince pie*; the hand is *bag*, from *bag of sand*; the arm the *false*, from *false alarm*. A certain important part of one's anatomy is the *Derby*, or *Derby Kell*, from one Derby Kelly, and the garment that covers it is the *Charlie*, from Charlie Prescott; but who these heroes were I have not discovered. A collar is an *Oxford*, from *Oxford*

*scholar*. Nothing, you see, is gained by rhyming slang; no saving in time; and often indeed the slang term is longer than the real word, as in tie, which is *all me*, from *all me eye*, and hat, which is *this and that* in full.

Your feet are your *plates*, from *plates of meat*; your boots are your *daisies*, from *daisy roots*; your teeth are your *Hampsteads*, from a north London common; money is *don't be*, from *don't be funny*; the fire is the *Anna*, from *Anna Maria*. Whisky is *I 'm so*, from *I 'm so frisky*; beer is *pig's ear* in full; the waiter is the *hot*, from *hot pertater*; and so forth.

And these foolish synonyms are really used, too, as you will find out with the greater ease if (as I did) you loiter in the Dolly. 'In the Dolly?' you ask. Oh, if you want any more information let me give it: in the Garden—Covent Garden, from *Dolly Varden*.

But what I want now to know is the extent of the rhyming vocabulary and the process by which new words are added to it. Who invents them and how would they gain currency? That question my friend could not answer.

## THE THREE PHRASES

'WHO 'll have a cooler ?' the late Fred Leslie (of immortal memory) used to ask, flinging a handful of torn-up paper into the air and shivering as the flakes came down. Another comedian, not less famous, Mr. Harry Tate, has invented a reducer of heat, but in his case it is mental heat rather than physical; and the cure consists of three phrases.

These phrases, he maintains, if applied systematically and rhythmically—no matter what the argument or cause of the dispute or the height of the other party's thermometer — are bound to bring about either perfect peace or the rout of the enemy, probably in silence. It may be a taxi-driver smarting under the justice of the fare paid him; it may be a too officious official; it may merely be a rude stranger—the same result is guaranteed.

These are the phrases:

1. Don't say that.
2. Don't be unkind.
3. Now you 're being humorous.

For the sake of an example let us take the case—perhaps the most probable—of a taxi-driver. But an Emperor would do as well. The cabman's fare

is three shillings, and you have given him a shilling tip, but, owing to the lateness of the hour, or his distance from home, or the rain, he considers himself underpaid.

'Here,' he says, 'the job 's worth more than that, isn't it?'

'Don't say that.'

'But I do say it. A gentleman who was a gentleman would make it worth my while.'

'Don't be unkind.'

'Unkind! What do you mean? If I 'd known I wasn't going to get more than this, I wouldn't have taken you.'

'Now you 're being humorous.'

'Humorous be ——. I 'm not humorous.'

'Don't say that!'

'Oh, go to——'

'Don't be unkind.'

'If ever you hail me again, strike me pink if I drive you—no, not for a quid a mile.'

'Now you 're being humorous.'

'Humorous! I tell you I 'm not humorous. I 'm serious.'

'Don't say that.'

By this time any ordinary cabman will be moving off. In the case of the extraordinary ones the three phrases must recur a little oftener, that 's all.

I mentioned an Emperor just now; let us try his case. The same prescription applies.

'I offer you a German peace.'

'Don't say that.'

'We to retain Belgium.'

'Don't be unkind.'

'And recover our Colonies.'

'Now you 're being humorous.'

'Humorous! If you don't agree you 'll soon find there 's nothing humorous about it.'

'Don't say that.'

'I do say it, and I shall go on saying it.'

'Don't be unkind.'

'How could a German ever be unkind?'

'Now you 're being humorous.'

'Bah! We leave humour to you British. We prefer sense.'

'Don't say that.'

'I do say it.'

'Don't be unkind.'

'Unkind! Aren't we here to talk peace?'

'Now you 're being humorous . . .'

Why should these three phrases be so deadly? Their first merit is to lift their user into a position of superiority which cannot be without its effect on the other. Then they give him the semblance of a pained reasonableness, and a pained reasonableness is both offensive and defensive, being one of the most difficult armour-plates to penetrate and also, in time, an irresistible siege-gun. The man who tells you not to be unkind always has you at a disadvantage

and must in time wear you out; while to go on to accuse you of humour is even subtler. You know perfectly well that you had no intention of being humorous; you even know that you were not; but since the desire to be thought humorous is a prevailing human passion you come in time to wonder if, after all, you may not have brought off something rather good, and in that fond hope your anger fades.

As a matter of fact, although there must always be moments of irascibility, the War has not, so far as one's observation goes, increased bad temper; rather the reverse. Probably our ever-present consciousness of so stupendous a calamity has made individual bickerings too petty, or we have been stunned into equability; whatever the reason, the fact remains that one may pass about this great city of conflicting ambitions and see only human beings in amity. Here and there the driver of one vehicle may snarl a sarcasm at the driver of another (who obviously ought to have brought out his mother to hold the reins in his stead), but, take them all round, tempers are being amazingly well kept.

Although the inventor of the Three Phrases pretends to have devised his system in order that those who practise it may triumph over their antagonists, one may entertain the suspicion (for he is a great philosopher) that part of his purpose was that those

who practise it should triumph over themselves too. For it would be impossible to put it into effect without absolute calmness, and to maintain calmness in disputation is more than the beginning of wisdom and victory.

## TANTALUS *EN VOYAGE*

IT is generally agreed that, although doubtless God could easily have made a more exciting flavour than the mushroom's, doubtless He never did. Hence the heightened pulses when this most desirable of fungi begin to appear (after a blend of hot sun and a little rain in August) and the lifted dish-cover reveals the unfamiliar ecstasy of stewed or fried. For the mushroom should be served alone; those cooks who consider it an adjunct to other food do not know.

News that the season had begun, with unusual suddenness and in great abundance, was reaching us from various quarters; but we had no luck ourselves. Round about Maidstone, quantities: so one letter said. Aunt Agnes in Gloucestershire was getting a dish of buttons out of the paddock every morning. The Saundersons at Witley were literally living on mushrooms, even to growing tired of them; but in spite of satiety (satiety!) the economy was most cheering. And still we ourselves had no luck. Capricious things, mushrooms; they will grow in one meadow like daisies, while in those all

around it, where the conditions would seem to be precisely similar, never a sign.

And there is something beside mere caprice, too; there is, alas! the greed of man. And not only the greed, but the inhuman habits of man and the discomfort to which he is willing to put himself in order to gratify his palate. Honour—even unselfishness—there may be among thieves (so complex are we!), but I assure you that there is none among mushroom-gatherers; not, at any rate, about us. Why it should be so is an ethnographical problem which I am incapable of solving, but the fact remains that in our neighbourhood there are people who actually take pleasure in getting up at four in order to pick the mushrooms which otherwise would be picked by those who got up at five or, more reasonably, like myself now and then, at six. Surely six should be early enough! With such competition how can one enjoy a savour which was clearly intended to be equally for the benefit of all?

To indicate to what lengths the appetite for mushrooms will take people, let me herewith place it on record that in the meadow next to my home, which, although I don't happen to rent it, is obviously more mine by sheer right of proximity than any one else's, except the farmer, who sensibly looks upon all mushrooms as toadstools (or toads' meat as he confusedly but very luckily calls it)—in this meadow the Vicar himself has been seen in the small hours suspiciously

peering and stooping, whereas he has no fewer than five meadows of his own. The Vicar, the appointed custodian of our souls, the indicator of the road to virtue! I ask you.

Legally he is within his rights; but morally? decently? No. For although it is true, owing to some short-sighted legislation that has never been corrected (and we give the impostors £400 a year apiece!) mushrooms may—unless it can be proved that they are under scientific cultivation—be trespassed for without the normal consequent prosecution, yet none the less there should be a certain respect for prescriptive rights. The contiguity of residences should be sympathetically considered and preferential treatment given to people in the immediate neighbourhood, whether they are prepared to get up before six or not. The world, however, having got into a very bad state, the fact remains that I have had no mushrooms yet. Either they are not growing hereabouts (but rumour says otherwise) or infamously early risers secure the whole harvest.

But that is not all.

The other day I had to visit town, which means a railway journey of some hours. At first I had the local paper. Then we reached a station where a London paper could be obtained, and I had that. Then, disregarding the book I had brought, I began to look out of the window, at first listlessly, but later

with intense interest, for I was gradually conscious that the meadows were full of mushrooms. Although the hour was between ten and eleven, mushrooms were still there, and so plentiful as to catch the eye even in an express train. More than catch it—bemuse it, madden it. The situation became almost unbearable. I thought of the lifted covers of dishes, I thought of the stewed and the fried, the steam, the aroma. I could see in the mind's eye exactly how those big white ones would dwindle and darken in the culinary process—minute, it is true, but so black, so comely! And still the meadows—it was in a long river valley—continued to be patched with them; all wasted. That was the terrible thought. This wonderful exotic food perishing for want of picking, and a potential picker, and probably the best judge of mushrooms in the world, so near and yet so far! For the train was tearing along and we were not due to pause again for many miles.

And then suddenly came a ray of hope, for I caught sight of the communication cord. The penalty, five pounds only! Was it worth it? I could pull it, scramble out, pick as many mushrooms as I could carry—and all for a fiver! Was it worth it? I had as a matter of fact five pounds with me to spend on books; but what are books? Books may be made of paper that is white, but when they are cooked do they shrivel and turn black and distil amazing and indescribably alluring essences? I rose and reached

for the cord, but at that moment we rushed into a tunnel, and when we emerged the whole country was changed and barren.

That evening, in London, I had some mushrooms at a restaurant. But mushrooms at a restaurant are useless.

## LONDON'S WORST ACTOR [1]

IT is proverbial that a child may lead a horse to the water, but that not even the Prime Minister, with all his persuasive gifts, could make him drink. An even more difficult task is to induce a horse in the pink of robust health to convey a suggestion of being seriously ill—as I chance just to have discovered. It is not the kind of discovery that one can anticipate; indeed, when I woke on the morning of the day on which it happened and, as is my habit, lay for a while forecasting the possible or probable course of events during the next four-and-twenty hours, this example of equine limitation had no place whatever in my thoughts. To the receptive and adventurous observer many curious things may, however, occur; and no sooner was lunch finished than out of a clear sky fell a friend and a taxi (the god and the machine, if you will), and jointly they conveyed me to as odd a building as I have ever thought to find any horse in, where, under a too searching blue glare, I found an assemblage of people as strange as their environment.

There were men in evening dress, toying with

[1] From *'Twixt Eagle and Dove* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

cigarettes and bending over women in evening dress; there was an adventuress or two, one with hair in such fluffed-out abundance as can only be a perquisite of notable wickedness; there was a stockman, who was, I fancy, too fond of her; there was a lady in riding boots; there was an expansive youth in pyjamas; and there were footmen and page-boys. And all seemed to me made-up to a point of excess. Who could they be? a stranger to the strides of science might well ask. Strayed revellers? A lost party of masqueraders being held here on bail and photographed for identification purposes?—for there was no doubt about the photography, because the masterful gentleman with a manuscript, who gave them instructions, every now and then stood aside in order that the camera-operator might direct his machine-gun and turn the handle; but what was said I could not hear, such was the crackling and fizzling of the blue lights.

I cannot pretend to have learned much about the cinema on such a brief visit, but I acquired a few facts. One is that there is no need for any continuity to be observed by the photographer, because the various scenes, taken in any order, can, in some wonderful way, be joined up afterwards, in their true order, and made consecutive and natural. Indeed, I should say that the superficially casual and piecemeal manner in which a moving drama can be built up is the dominant impression which I brought

away from this abode of mystery. The contrast between the magically fluid narrative as unreeled on the screen and the broken, zigzag, and apparently negligent preparation of it in the studio is the sharpest I can imagine. And it increases one's admiration of the man with the scissors and the thread (or however it is done) who unites the bits and makes them smoothly run.

Another fact which I acquired is that unless the face of the cinema performer is painted yellow it comes out an impossible hue, so that to see a company in broad daylight is to have the impression that one has stumbled upon a house party in the Canary Isles. And a third fact is that the actors, while free to say what they like to each other at many times, must, when in a situation illustrated by words thrown on the screen, use those identical words. One reason for this rule is, I am told, that some time ago, in an American film, the producer of which was rather lax, one of the characters spoke to another with an impossible licence, and a school of deaf mutes visiting the picture palace ' lip-read ' the awful result. The consequence (America being a wonderful country, with a sufficiency of deaf-and-dumb to warrant protective measures) was the withdrawal of the film and the punishment of the offenders.

Meanwhile, what of the horse ? I will tell you.

The camera-operator having taken as much of the fast life in the swell hotel (with the hollow columns

without backs to them) as was necessary, including a ' still ' (as it is called in the movie world—meaning a photograph in the ordinary sense of the term) of the fluffiest of the adventuresses in an expression signifying a blend of depravity and triumph, turned his attention to the loose-box which some attendants had been rapidly constructing, chiefly with the assistance of a truss of straw. Into this apartment was led (through the hotel lounge, and at enormous risk to its plaster masonry) a horse—the horse, in fact, which was to defeat Edison. Of the plot of the play I know nothing. (How could I, having seen it in preparation ?) But this I can tell you : that the hero's horse had to be ill ; and this also : that the horse in question refused to be ill. In vain for the groom to shake his head, in vain for the hero to say that it had the shivers ; never was a horse so far removed from malady, so little in need of the vet. Nor could any device produce the desired effect. If, then, in the days to come you see at the cinema a very attractive story with a horse in it, and the horse shivers only in the words on the screen, you will know why. It is because the movies for once met their master.

## A STUDY IN SYMMETRY [1]

ONCE upon a time there was an artist with historical leanings not unassociated with the desire for pelf—pelf being, even to idealists, what petrol is to a car. The blend brought him one day to Portsmouth, where the *Victory* lies, with the honourable purpose of painting a picture of that famous ship with Nelson on board. The Admiral was of course dying, and the meritorious intention of the artist, whose wife wanted some new curtains, was to make the work as attractive as might be and thus extract a little profit from the wave of naval enthusiasm which was then passing over the country ; for not only was the picture itself to be saleable, but reproductions were to be made of it.

Permission having been obtained from the authorities, the artist boarded the *Victory*, set up his easel on her deck, and settled down to his task, the monotony of which was pleasantly alleviated by the chatter of the old salts who guard the ship and act as guides to the tourists visiting her. All these estimable men not only possessing views on art, but having come by now to the firm belief that they had

[1] From *'Twixt Eagle and Dove* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

personally fought with Nelson and witnessed his end (and even perhaps had partaken of his dying kiss), their criticisms were not too easily combated: so that the artist had not a tedious moment. Thus, painting, conversing, and learning (as one can learn only from a trained imparter of information), three or four days passed quickly away and the picture was done.

So far there has been nothing to strain credulity. But a time will come—is, in fact, upon us.

On the evening of the last day, as the artist was sitting at early dinner with a friend before catching the London train, his remarks turned (as an artist's sometimes will) to the work upon which he had just been engaged. He expressed satisfaction with it in the main, but could not, he said, help feeling that its chances of becoming a real success would be sensibly increased if he could find as a model for the central figure some one whose resemblance to Nelson was noticeable.

'It seems to be a law of nature,' he went on, 'that there cannot exist at the same time—that is to say, among contemporaries—two faces exactly alike. That is an axiom. Strange as it may sound, among all the millions of countenances with two eyes, a nose in the middle, and a mouth below it, no two precisely resemble each other. There are differences, however slight.' (He was now beginning really to enjoy the sound of his own voice.) 'That is, as I

say, among contemporaries: in the world at the moment in which I am speaking. But,' he continued, 'I see no reason why, after the lapse of years, Nature should not begin precisely to reproduce physiognomies and so save herself the trouble of for ever varying them. That being so, and surely the hypothesis is not too far-fetched'—here his friend said, 'No, not at all, oh no!'—'that being so, why,' the artist continued, 'should there not be at this moment, more than a century later, some one whose resemblance to Nelson is exact? He would not be necessarily a naval man—probably, indeed, not, for Nelson's face was not characteristic of the sea—but whoever he was, even if he were an archbishop, I,' said the painter firmly, 'should not hesitate to go up to him and ask him to sit to me.'

The friend agreed that this was a very proper attitude, and that it betokened true sincerity of purpose and devotion to Art.

'Nelson's face,' the painter continued, 'was an uncommon one. So large and so mobile a mouth is rare. But it is by no means impossible that a duplicate exists, and no matter who was the owner of it, even were he an archbishop, I should not hesitate to go up and ask him to sit to me.'

(For the benefit of any feminine reader of this veracious history, I should say that the repetition which she has just noticed is not a slip on my part, but has been carefully set down. It is an attempt

to give verisimilitude to the conversation—because men have a habit of saying things like that twice.)

The friend again remarked that the painter's resolve did him infinite credit, and the two started for the station, still conversing on this theme.

On entering their carriage the first thing to take their attention was a quiet little man in black, who was the absolute double of the hero of Trafalgar.

'Good gracious!' whispered the painter excitedly, 'do you see that? There 's the very man. The likeness to Nelson is astonishing. I never saw anything like it. I don't care who he is, I must tackle him. It 's the most extraordinary chance that ever occurred.'

Assuming his most silky and deferential manner—for, though clearly not an archbishop, unless in mufti, this might yet be a person of importance—the painter approached the stranger and tendered a card.

'I trust, sir, that you will excuse me,' he began, 'for the liberty I am taking, but I am an artist and I happen to be engaged on a picture of Nelson on the *Victory*. I have all the accessories and so forth, but what I very seriously need is a brief sitting from some gentleman with a likeness to the great Admiral. Such, sir, as yourself. It may be news to you—it probably is—but you, sir, if I may say so, are so like the famous and immortal warrior as almost to

take one's breath away. It is astonishing, wonderful! Might I—would it be—could you—would you, sir, be so very kind as to allow me to paint you? I would, of course, make every effort not to inconvenience you—I would arrange so that your time should be mine.'

'Of course I will, guv'nor,' said the man. 'Being a professional model, I 've been sitting for Nelson for years. Why, I 've been doing it for a nartist this very afternoon.'

## SOME OF OUR CONQUERORS

NEXT to golf there is perhaps no pleasure greater, between men, than pointing out what is wrong —wrong not only in the Government, which of course is perpetually vulnerable, but in social life too.

Oysters, for example. At the beginning of every new oyster season—and to many right-minded men life is a blank between April 30 and September 1—the papers tell us, with dismal iteration, that there never was such a good crop, and oysters are among the few things which the War has not made dearer, and even the poor man can enjoy his oysters this year, and at Billingsgate they are so cheap that twenty a shilling can be obtained retail and every one with a pearl in it, and a lot more besides; but none the less the restaurants go on asking three-and-six or four shillings a dozen, as though nothing had occurred to bring the price down.

Surely that 's a subject for discussion! Threepence-halfpenny each for oysters just because there is a selfish—or shall I say?—yes, I will chance it—a shell-fish—ring which is determined that the public, at any rate the richer public, shall not participate in cheap rates! It is of course a scandal.

No wonder that that little band of true patriots, censors and friends of man and equity (of whom I am one) which assembles in the corner of a smoking-room of one of the few select clubs left, have something to say about it. But of our remarks on the delicious bivalve, as the stylists call it, and inflated prices, nothing need be mentioned here. It is to our decisions with regard to another unsatisfactory affair that I wish to call attention.

Somebody—I think it was Masters—began it by informing us that he had a story of medical turpitude to unfold to us. But he had no chance, for old Colonel Blythe was all over him in an instant.

'Don't say anything against doctors,' he said. 'I won't listen to it. Doctors are all right. They do their best. It 's dentists that want reforming.'

A murmur of support indicated how widespread was this feeling.

'Yes, sir,' the Colonel went on, 'there may be a doctor here and there who is deficient. But take them as a whole they 're wonderful. They 're fine fellows. They work. They consider their patients. If you 're ill your doctor comes to you; he doesn't command you to go to him. If you need half a day's attention he gives it to you. If you 're bad in the night you can send for him, and he 'll get up. You know the address and his home telephone number; and he 'll come the next day too, and every day, and

sometimes twice a day—till you 're well, or dead. But what does a dentist do ? '

The Colonel glared at us as furiously as though we too were dentists.

' What does a dentist do ? ' he repeated. ' I 'll tell you. The dentist does as little as he can. To begin with, he doesn't come to us at all, but sends for us : chucks us half an hour here, on Monday, say, at 11.30, and then half an hour on Friday at 4.15, just as if he were an employer of labour and we were starving applicants. And when we get there he is never ready, and then when we reach his room he is in a hurry because it is late, and most of the time he is leaving us to go to the telephone ; and if, when we go away and have pain, we want to get at him again, we can't, because he never lives at his business address. A doctor does, but a dentist never does. Dentists practise in Welbeck Street and live at Great Missenden. Yes, sir, Great Missenden ; that 's what dentists do. I tell you they 're clever fellows, and we 're their dupes. You can't ring a dentist up in the night ; no one ever spoiled a dentist's rest yet. And as for Saturdays and Sundays, they never show up at all either day.

' And that 's not all,' the Colonel continued. ' They 're always too busy. However busy a doctor is he can always come to-day. A dentist can't find a minute till Thursday, and then you must be squeezed in between other patients.

'And then their bills. Any one else tells you what you are paying for. A dentist says "Attendance—thirty guineas." On consulting the dictionary I find that "attendance" means "waiting on." Now who does the waiting at the dentist's—you or he? Why, you do, of course. It 's all waiting, and under dashed uncomfortable conditions too, with back numbers of *The Graphic*, and a lot of frowsy people who it is ten to one are to be called before you are. Attendance, indeed! Why, we ought to be paid for our lost time.

'But it will all have to be changed. There 's a fortune for the dentist who does not take on more than he can properly accomplish, who keeps his appointments, who realizes that teeth don't respect office hours and ache only between 10 and 5, and who, living in London, is accessible at odd times. Dentists have been bullying us too long. They 've got to come into line.'

'When?' I ventured to ask.

'Well,' said the Colonel, 'you won't see it, and I won't. And my sons won't. But possibly our grandsons, when they 're very old men, may.'

# BÊTES NOIRES

## I

WE were indulging in one of the minor—or possibly major—pleasures of life. We were discussing the kind of people we most disliked. I don't mean the real criminals, such as those cabinet-makers who construct, and those furniture-dealers who sell, chests of drawers in which the drawers stick. They are miscreants for whom there should be government machinery of punishment. I mean the people who mean well—always a poisonous class—but irritate subtly and in such a way that you can't hit back: the people, for example, who take one of your own pet stories, begin to tell it to you and won't stop even when you say that you know it. People like that, and people who are so polite that they make ordinary decent manners appear brutish by contrast; and people who continually ask you if you know such and such a celebrity and seem shocked if you don't; and people who want to know if you are doing anything on Friday fortnight; and people who could have done such and such a thing for you if you had only asked them three minutes sooner.

Those are the kinds of people I mean, and we had each named one variety when it came to the Traveller's turn.

'I 'll tell you the people I most dislike,' he said. 'They are the people who always have seen, in foreign places, the best thing of all, which is always something that you yourself have missed. You are comparing notes, say, on Italy (it is usually Italy, by the way). "Of course you went to Castel Petrarca," says your companion. "No." "Why, it 's perfectly wonderful and only half an hour's drive. There 's the most exquisite view there in the world and a villa overlooking the river, with a garden—well, all other gardens are ridiculous ever after: even that jewel of a place near Savenna. You know—on the right of the road as you drive out to Acqua Forte." '

He paused for breath, and then continued: 'Or you are talking of pictures—the work, say, of Binatello of Porli, that little known but supreme master. "Of course" (they always begin with "of course") —"of course you have seen the Annunciation in the little chapel at Branca Secca?" you are asked. "No! But how appalling! You too!—to think of you missing it, of all people!" (This is a particularly horrid stab.) "Why, it 's the best thing of all; it 's Binatello at his very finest. It has all the charm of the Parmesan Madonna, with the broader, stronger manner of the Beccafico Deposition added. It 's

marvellous. Fancy you not seeing that. Well, I am sorry."

'Those are the people I most dislike,' said the Traveller.

## II

If ever I write a Hymn of Hate, or, at any rate, of resentment, it will be about a certain type of Englishman whom I encounter far too often and shall never understand. And he should be hymned, not because it will do him any good, but because it relieves my feelings.

It is really rather a curious case, for he might be quite a nice fellow and, I have little doubt, often is; but he boasts and flaunts an inhuman insensibility that excites one's worst passions.

What would you say is the quality or characteristic most to be desired in every member of our social commonwealth? Obviously there is only one reply to this question: that he should be decently susceptible to draughts. If society is to go on, either we must all be so pachydermatous as to be able to disregard draughts, or we must feel them and act accordingly. There should not be here and there a strange Ishmaelite whose delight it is to be played upon by boreal blasts. But there is. I meet him in the train, and the other day I hymned him.

O thou (my hymn of dislike, of annoyance, of remonstrance, began):

O thou, the foe of comfort, heat,
O thou who hast the corner seat,
Facing the engine, as we say
(Although it is so far away,
  And in between
  So many coaches intervene,
The phrase partakes of foolishness);—
O thou who sittest there no less,
Keeping the window down
Though all the carriage frown,
  Why dost thou so rejoice in air?
Not air that nourishes and braces,
Such as one finds in watering-places,
  But air to chill a polar bear—
Malignant air at sixty miles an hour
  That rakes the carriage fore and aft,
Wherein we cower;
  Not air at all, but sheer revengeful draught!
How canst thou like it? Say! How canst thou do it?
Thou even read'st a paper through it!

Know'st thou no pain?
  Sciatica or rheumatism
  Leading to balm or sinapism?
Doth influenza pass thee by?
Hast never cold or bloodshot eye
Like ordinary Christian folk
  Who sit in draughts against their will
  And pray they'll not be ill?

Even in tunnels (this is past a joke)
Thou car'st no rap,
Nor, as a decent man would, pull'st the strap,
But lett'st the carriage fill with smoke
Till all but thou must choke.

Why art thou anti-social thus,
Why dost thou differ so from us?
Thou pig! thou hippopotamus!

I don't pretend to be satisfied with these lines. They are not strong, not complete. Still they might do a little good somewhere, and every little helps.

## III

My acquaintance X., who collects all the funny stories, has just told me the latest, and, as usual, having told it quite well, and having been rewarded by laughter, he repeated the point. Why do otherwise sensible men do this? Reflecting upon X.'s bad habit, it is borne in upon me that the art of stopping is a neglected one. Pope gave the ultimate place to 'the art to blot'; but I should vote for the art to stop as being even worthier of cultivation. Or, in other words—and particularly in the cases of the raconteur, the orator, and the preacher—the art of leaving well alone.

The temptation to the orator to continue after he has finished is, of course, far greater than that to the raconteur. For two reasons. One is that a story has a natural end, which is usually a surprise, and, therefore, an automatic climax not to be elaborated. The other is that an orator is often applauded during his remarks, and applause goes to the head and disturbs judgment. This is why quite sound men can be foolish 'on their feet' and let so many golden opportunities go by. The two worst offenders are the introducers of other speakers and the after-dinner proposers of or responders to toasts. The advertised

orator can be as long as he likes—nobody much minds ; but the local gentleman who tells us who the great visitor is, and what a fine fellow he is, and how the country practically depends upon him, must be short. He cannot, indeed, be too short, and he never is.

As for story-tellers, I blush for them far too often. They can be *bêtes noires* indeed! X. merely repeats the point, telling me why it is funny. But Z. goes farther and insists on telling stories that I know, even after I have told him that I know them ; an avowal made by me not so much to save his tongue as my own features, which distort themselves into false amusement very reluctantly and with pain. Then there is Y., who having told a good story adds to it phrases which make the blood run cold, such as, 'What happened after, history relateth not.'

But Y. is not lonely. Far too many raconteurs share the foible, and now and then even the masters of narration. Take, for example, one of the most entertaining volumes of reminiscences ever written—William Le Fanu's *Seventy Years of Irish Life*—which is packed with good stories, for the most part told to perfection. Mr. Le Fanu himself sometimes fails to leave well alone. For instance, here is a story of a parrot at family prayers. 'My father,' says Mr. Le Fanu, 'had got to the middle of the Lord's Prayer when, in a loud voice, Poll called out, "As many as are of that opinion will say 'Aye' ; as many as are

of the contrary opinion will say 'No.' The 'ayes' have it."' Well, that is the story. But Mr. Le Fanu actually adds, 'I need hardly say, prayers were finished under difficulties.'

As for preachers! Here we touch on tragedy. I found recently in an American paper an excellent criticism from the hearth, in the story of a pastor's son being asked his opinion of his father's last sermon, which was the subject of general admiration. The boy admitted that the sermon was good, 'but,' said he, 'there were three fine places where dad could have stopped.' Very few of us have ever listened to a sermon without noticing at least as many similarly favourable situations. I remember how, as a child, I considered myself more than unfairly treated—positively deceived—by the preacher's use of the phrase, 'one word more,' to introduce a complete and lengthy new development of his theme.

It is false promises such as these that sow the seeds of scepticism, and men of God should avoid them. To the mind of (comparative) innocence 'one word' means one word, and the realization that one word is in reality a thousand words is darkly disillusioning. Another device used by preachers for depressing the hearts of their congregation is an inflexion of finality in the tones when no finality is there. I can feel again the ancient anguish when the inexorable voice, after so unmistakably declining towards a finish, dishonourably began again.

## A LONDON THRILL [1]

THE scene was Gerrard Street: a rather curious thoroughfare notable for possessing three or four restaurants dear to Bohemia, the great West End telephone exchange, the homes of Dryden and Edmund Burke, a number of cinema offices, and many foreign inhabitants.

The time was three o'clock in the afternoon.

In the middle were two or three big vans, loading or unloading and filling the roadway, thus cutting the street into two so effectively that I, approaching from the east, had no knowledge of anything happening in the western half. I therefore attached no significance to the hurrying steps of a policeman in front of me, but was a little surprised to see him pick his way almost on tiptoe between the vans—yet not sufficiently surprised to anticipate drama.

But the drama was there, awaiting me, on the other side of the vans, and the policeman—this being London drama—was naturally one of the performers. For there never was a street play yet—comedy, tragedy, or farce—without a policeman in the cast. It is a convention to say—as every one has in his

[1] From *'Twixt Eagle and Dove* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

time said and will say again—that a policeman is never there when he is wanted; but that is true only in the dull sense: what we mean is that the policeman is never there before the curtain rises, or, in other words, in time to prevent the performance altogether. How tame if he were! As a matter of fact, by delaying his arrival until the affair is in good train he takes his proper part as a London entertainer; that is to say, he *is* there when he is wanted—wanted to complete the show.

It was thus on the present occasion.

On passing the vans I was suddenly aware that the curtain had risen; for on the south pavement were some fifteen or twenty people watching two women at the house opposite, one of whom, a young one in a long brown overcoat, was trying to get past the half-opened door, while the other, an older one, in black, repulsed her from within. Just as I arrived the policeman darted from between the vans, seized the young woman's arm, and said, 'That 's enough of that. You come along with me.' Her reluctance was intense, but she did not resist; in fact, she had about her a suggestion of having expected it.

One of the spectators remarked, 'Quite time, too'; another added, 'She was arstin' for it.' The second (and innocent) woman disappeared into the house, and we all began to move in a westward direction.

Now, to be arrested is nothing. The action is too

swift to be properly spectacular, and the drama is for the most part psychological. Had this young woman, the nature of whose offence I did not learn, been a criminal or malefactor of any importance, she would have been bustled into a cab and lost to sight. Happily, however, she was only a common brawler or disturber of the peace, and therefore there was no cab. I say happily, because it is rarely that one sees people so cheered up on a dull, cold day as every one seemed to be who caught sight of her, between Gerrard Street, where the policeman put that deadly grip upon her, and Vine Street, where she vanished into the station. Watching the effect of her impact on the street, 'Captured to make a London holiday' is the form of words that ran through my mind.

When we turned from Gerrard Street into Wardour Street we were about thirty strong. When we turned from Wardour Street into Shaftesbury Avenue we were forty-five strong, for as the glad news spread we increased amazingly. It is a point of honour with Londoners to accompany the fallen on their way. Not to jeer at them, although our absence would be kinder, nor to sympathize with them; merely to be in whatever is going on. If our prevalent expression is one of amusement, that is because we are being entertained, and entertained free. No malice.

And so we proceeded. Every now and then the

young woman, who had one of those thin white faces that often mark the excitable and even the not quite sane, and who, I fancy, had been drinking, stopped to enlarge upon her grievance; but the policeman urged her ever onward, always with those terrible official fingers encircling her arm.

The retinue became alarming, like a food queue on the march. Little boys who a moment ago had no hope of any such luck, screamed the tidings to other little boys in the byways, and these, in their turn, shrieked out to others, so that reinforcements scampered down Rupert Street and Great Windmill Street to swell the concourse. In one little boy I watched horror struggle with joy. 'They 've pinched a lady!' he exclaimed in shocked tones, and then hurried to the head of the line to miss nothing of the outrage. The people on the tops of motor-buses stood up. At Piccadilly Circus the traffic was suspended.

A pathetic young woman in a long brown overcoat having tried for just a few moments too long to enter a house in Gerrard Street (to which, for all I know, she had a perfect right), half London was disorganized!

And so she crossed Regent Street, passed the Piccadilly Hotel, and at the alley leading to Vine Street was swallowed up. The most eager of the adults and all the small boys penetrated the alley too, but the rest, with one last longing look, melted

away and resumed the ordinary tedium of life. The thrill was over . . .

But the squalor of that march! What she had done I have no notion, but she was well punished for it long before Vine Street was reached. I hope that magistrates sometimes take these distances into consideration.

## THOSE THIRTY MINUTES

THERE are many things that children should be taught, in addition to those in the curriculum; and one of the first is not to hang about seeing people off by train.

Then such episodes as this, which are being enacted on railway platforms all over England every day, would no longer be possible.

*Scene:* VICTORIA

The train for Brighton is in and already full, although half an hour has yet to go. In a first-class compartment intended for six are ten persons, among them a meek girl squeezed between two Lieutenants, who have lifted the padded arms dividing the seats. Outside at the window is the meek girl's friend, an elderly woman, who has come to see her off. They have nothing to say to each other; but the friend cannot tear herself away. The other passengers hate the sight of her.

*Elderly Woman.* Well, take care of yourself.

*Meek Girl.* Yes.

[*A minute passes, during which, as in all the subsequent minutes, the friend beams through the window.*

*E. W.* Are you cramped in there?

*M. G.* (*who can hardly breathe for Lieutenants*). Oh no, not at all.

*E. W.* You look as if you were.

[*The Lieutenants make insincere efforts to release her a little.*

*M. G.* Oh no, not at all really.

[*A minute passes.*

*E. W.* It 's lucky we were here early.

*M. G.* Yes, isn't it? [*Time passes.*

*E. W.* I wonder if you 'll stop at Croydon.

*M. G.* I wonder.

*E. W.* Probably not. I expect this is an express.

[*More time passes.*

*E. W.* Shall I get you a paper?

*M. G.* No, thank you. [*Another interval.*

*E. W.* (*after consulting her watch*). The time 's going on. You 'll start soon.

*M. G.* How soon?

*E. W.* In about twenty minutes. No, nineteen and a half.

*M. G.* That 's good. I shan't be sorry when we 're there.

*E. W.* Be sure to take care of yourself.

*M. G.* Oh yes, yes.

*E. W.* Here comes a paper boy. You 're sure you won't have anything?

*M. G.* Quite, thank you. [*Another interval.*

*E. W.* I wonder if you 'll see the Wilkinsons.

*M. G.* I wonder.

*E. W.* I shouldn't be surprised.

*M. G.* Nor should I.

*E. W.* Be sure to remember me to them if you do.

*M. G.* Oh yes.

*E. W.* But I dare say you won't see them.

*M. G.* No.

[*Another Lieutenant with a suit-case looks in and decides to make a perch there. He does so at the far end.*

*E. W.* (*humorously*). Like sardines in a tin.

*M. G.* (*with a laugh*). Yes. [*More time passes.*

*E. W.* You 'll be glad to be there, won't you ?

*M. G.* Yes.

*E. W.* (*brightly*). You 'll find the sea at Brighton.

*M. G.* Yes, I shall.

*E. W.* Sure you have no message for me to take back.

*M. G.* No. But thank you for seeing me off.

*E. W.* That 's all right. I like seeing people off. (*She goes away for a moment, to the intense relief of the other passengers. Then she comes back.*) The train 's frightfully full. Strange how much travelling there still is !

*M. G.* Yes. [*The train begins to move.*

*E. W.* Now you 're off. Be sure to give them my love. [*She walks beside the train.*

*M. G.* Yes.

*E. W.* Take care of yourself.

*M. G.* Yes, oh yes.

[*After a yard or so the train stops.*

*E. W.* You weren't going, after all.

*M. G.* No.

*E. W.* A false alarm. (*Looks at her watch.*) Why, it wants another five minutes yet.

*M. G.* Not really?

*E. W.* Yes. I 'll tell them all what a full train it was.

*M. G.* Yes, do. [*More time passes.*

*E. W.* There are lots of people who can't get seats.

*M. G.* No.

*E. W.* Lucky we were here early.

*M. G.* Yes, wasn't it?

[*Another minute passes.*

*E. W.* I wonder what all these people will do who can't find room.

*M. G.* (*with an inspiration*). Wait for the next, perhaps.

*E. W.* Yes, very likely. Yes, that 's what they 'll do—wait for the next.

*M. G.* Yes. [*Two more minutes pass.*

*E. W.* (*looking at her watch*). Now you really will be off directly. Be sure to give them my love.

*M. G.* Yes.

*E. W.* And take care of yourself.

*M. G.* Oh yes.

*E. W.* Don't catch a cold, will you?

*M. G.* Not if I can help it.

*E. W.* That 's right. Yes, now you 're really going.

[*She begins to keep pace with the moving train, waving her hand and nodding brightly.*

*E. W.* Be sure to give them my love.

*M. G.* Yes, good-bye.

*E. W.* Good-bye. Sure you 've got no messages for me ?

*M. G.* No, but thank you for coming.

*E. W.* (*breathlessly, almost running*). Oh, that 's all right. I love to. Good-bye.

*M. G.* Good-bye.

[*She would wave too, but her arms are pinioned by Lieutenants.*

## A MYSTERY SOLVED [1]

EVERY one must have observed a phenomenon of the London streets which becomes continually more noticeable. And not only must they have observed it, but have suffered from it.

At one time, in the age of gold, omnibuses had regular stopping-places at the corners of streets. The corner was the accepted spot; the crowds gathered there confident of the vehicle's arrival and decorous pause, and the omnibus honourably played the game, stopping there, emptying and refilling. The compact was observed on both sides, and life went like a marriage bell. But there came a gradual tendency towards the abandonment of the corners, causing the omnibuses to pull up farther and farther from them, so that it seems almost as if a time may come when, instead of Piccadilly Circus, for example, the stopping-place for west-bound omnibuses will be Hatchards' or Fortnum and Mason's.

Every one, as I say, must have noticed this change in traffic habits, and most people believe that police regulations are at the bottom of it.

But I know better; and the cause of my knowing better is a little conversation I have had with a driver.

[1] From *'Twixt Eagle and Dove* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

It was during one of the wettest days since Noah and his sons took to shipbuilding, and the driver dripped. A great crowd of miserable mortals awaited his omnibus at a certain recognized halt, all desperately anxious for a seat or even standing-room ; but these he disregarded, and carefully urged the vehicle on for another twenty yards.

While the people were running along the pavement to begin their struggle for a place, I asked him why he had put them to all that trouble. ' I suppose it 's the police,' I said.

' Not as I know of,' he replied.

' But why not stop where the public expect you to ? ' I asked.

' Why ? ' he inquired.

' Well, it would be more reasonable, more helpful,' I suggested.

' Who wants to help or be reasonable ? ' he replied. ' Here, look at me. I 'm driving this bus for hours and hours every day. I 'm cold and wet. I 'm putting on the brakes from morning to night, saving people's silly lives, until I 'm sick of the sight of them. If you was to drive a motor-bus in London, you 'd want a little amusement now and then, too.'

' So it 's just for entertainment that you dodge about over the stopping-places and keep changing them ? ' I asked.

' Yes,' he replied.

## THE SUGGESTION

ONE of my very best friends was talking—as people very kindly often do talk to me—about themes for essays, the idea having spread that I want to write such things.

'I 've got a really good subject for you,' he said. 'Braces.'

'Braces? Do you mean those affairs that hold——?'

'Yes. Braces.'

'But why don't you do it yourself?' I asked.

'I can't,' he said. 'I 'm not a writer. But I 'll give you one or two points. I 've been thinking about it for you for ever such a time. For example,' he said, 'one of the peculiarities of braces is the minute number of pairs that a man requires during quite a long life. Years and years must pass before braces wear out, and even then they can usually be mended. This means that the makers of braces cannot grow rich; at any rate, not by the leaps and bounds associated with makers, say, of mustard. There are, of course, one or two articles connected with the male toilet that last even longer than braces; but very few. I can, as a matter of fact,

think only of two—shoe-horns and boot-jacks. But shoe-horns are easily lost, and a boot-jack thrown from the window at a cat is rarely recoverable. In fact, all boot-jacks, because of this defect, coupled with their efficacy as a midnight missile, should be shaped like boomerangs.

'Braces,' my friend continued, 'are never lost, but there is no doubt whatever that they have the power, without any consumption of fern-seed, of becoming invisible. All articles, both of apparel itself and incident to apparel, such as studs, links, and keys, possess this strange and devastating gift; but none can so utterly defy a pair of normal eyes fixed upon the back of a chair as the pair of braces that hang over that chair-back.

'It 's one of the words—braces—that have no singular,' he went on. 'You can't talk of one brace; at any rate, not without getting into a muddle of multiplication, because one brace would mean two pairs. In America, of course, they 're called suspenders. You could branch away there—I 've noticed that you like branching away—and show how much more descriptive the American words for things are than ours. 'Every word paints a picture,' and so forth. 'Suspender' is, of course, much more telling. But we don't use the term—at least, not for men.

'And there 's another odd thing about braces,' he said, 'rather pathetic, too—I 'm told that his

braces are the most difficult proposition that a man who has lost an arm has to contend with. And this reflection might take you on to belts and into all kinds of bypaths; Kipling's Barrack Room Ballad about the shindy; and Daniel Lambert's abdominal cincture, known as the Illimitable Beldt. All kinds of useful padding.

'You might, while padding,' he said, 'touch upon embroidered braces: who are the men who wear embroidered braces, and why, and who embroider them. The gulf fixed between our curate's embroidered slippers and the embroidered braces of doggier men. The limits of what is proper and what not. And so forth.

'Then there 's the famous story of the schoolboy,' he said, 'who was asked to define "responsibility." You would have to introduce that. "What is responsibility?" was the question, and the boy replied that it was what was felt by one brace-button at the back when the other one came off.

'Nor must you forget,' he resumed—for there was no stopping him, bless his heart!—'the order given to our troops in France with regard to German prisoners. Perhaps you haven't heard it? Well, they were told that the first thing to be done, after getting their prisoners into camp, was to cut off their brace-buttons. Then, you see, they couldn't run away. I 'm sure you can make something of that—you, with your gifts.

'And there 's the story of Tennyson, too,' he said. 'You oughtn't to leave that out. That is, if you really want to cover all the ground. You see, Tennyson was at a garden party, and among the guests was a girl who adored his poetry, and whose one dream of bliss was to hear her idol speak. So the hostess led her to the seat under a tree to which the poet had retired.

'For a long while he said nothing, and then suddenly he broke a silence that was becoming very embarrassing by remarking fiercely: "Your stays are creaking."

'The devotee—part alarmed, part shocked, and wholly disappointed—thereupon jumped up and fled; but later in the afternoon she was conscious that Tennyson was approaching her very purposefully. She tried to avoid him, being now in a state of terror, by hiding among the guests; but it was all in vain, and at last he secured her attention. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I was wrong. It wasn't your stays that creaked; it was my braces."'

My friend was silent for quite a long time, rummaging his brain.

'I believe that 's all I can think of,' he said at last. 'What do you say? Is it a good subject for an essay?'

'Not by me,' I replied.

## AT THE SEASIDE[1]

[*From a Practical Guide to the Young*]

THE first thing to do on reaching the seaside is to find out when it is low tide. In each twelve hours low tide comes twenty minutes later, and knowing this you can arrange your days accordingly. Nothing is so saddening as to run down the beach in the belief that the tide is going out and to find that it is coming in.

To boys who wear knickerbockers the preparations for paddling are very simple; but girls are not so fortunate. Lewis Carroll (who wrote *Alice in Wonderland*) took their difficulties so seriously that whenever he went to the seaside to stay he used to have with him a packet of safety-pins for the use of any children that seemed to be in need of them. This piece of thoughtfulness on his part might determine you to carry them for yourselves.

In paddling, a nurse is both a help and a hindrance. In so far as she will mind your things and carry towels she is a help; but the fact that her presence makes it necessary for you to come out of the water at the same place at which you went in is a hindrance to

[1] From *Three Hundred Games and Pastimes* (Chatto & Windus).

true adventure. On the other hand, if she is not there you will probably have to carry your boots and stockings round your neck or in your hands, which is very hampering; and not having any towel, and handkerchiefs being so small and quickly soaked, you will not get your feet properly dried or cleaned of sand, and this will make the walk home very uncomfortable. One thing that the nurse, or whoever is guarding clothes, ought to be most particular about is to stay in the same spot all the time. The discovery that your things are not where you left them can spoil a whole morning.

Once ready, the walk, or hobble, over the stones to the sand begins. When there is a nurse she will perhaps tell you to keep on your shoes until the stones are done, and leave them there for her to fetch. Another way is to throw them back to her; but unless you throw very well this will probably mean just as much trouble to her as fetching them. If you have a walking-stick or a strong spade you can, even with naked feet, get over the stones fairly comfortably. A walking-stick, in fact, is rather a good thing to take into the water; you can push it into quicksands, and throw it out to sea and wade to it, and use it to hook in your boat with.

Sailing a good boat in the sea is not the best fun, but there is a kind of boat which is very easily made as you sit on the beach, and which is useful to play with when paddling, and afterwards to throw stones

at. You take a piece of cork for the hull. Cut a line down the middle underneath, and wedge a strip of slate in for a keel to keep her steady. Fix a piece of driftwood for a mast, and thread a piece of paper on that for a sail.

When paddling it is just as well not to get your clothes wet if you can help it. Clothes that are made wet with sea-water, which probably has a little sand in it, are as uncomfortable as crumbs in bed. There is no reason why you should get them wet if you paddle wisely. Sitting among the rocks, running through the water, and jumping the little crisping waves are the best ways to get soaked. Rounding a groyne often leads to a soaking too, because at the end of each groyne there is a hollow which (unless you climb the groyne) you must wade through or go into deepish water to avoid.

Seaside places where there are rocks and a great stretch of sand are the best. Rocks make paddling twice as exciting, because of the interesting things in the little pools—the anemones, and seaweeds, and shells, and crabs, and shrimps, and perhaps little fish. Sometimes these pools are quite hot. To enjoy the rocks properly you want a net.

To make full use of the sands a spade is necessary and a pail important. The favourite thing to make is a castle and a moat, and although the water rarely is willing to stay in the moat it is well to pour some in. The castle may also have a wall round it and all

kinds of other buildings within the wall. Abbeys are also made, and great houses with carefully arranged gardens, and villages, and churches. Railways with towns and stations here and there along the line are easily made, and there is the fun of being the train when the line is finished. The train is a good thing to be, because the same person is usually engine-driver and guard as well. Collisions are interesting now and then. The disadvantage of a railway on crowded sands is that passers-by injure the line and sometimes destroy, by a movement of the foot, a whole terminus; it is therefore better at small watering-places that few people have yet discovered. If an active game is wanted as well as mere digging and building, a sand fort is the best thing to make, because then it has to be held and besieged, and perhaps captured. In all sand operations stones are useful to mark boundaries.

Burying one another in the sand is good at the time, but gritty afterwards.

Seaweed and shells make good collections, but there is no use in carrying live fish home in pails. The fun is in catching the fish, not in keeping it; and some landladies dislike having the bathroom used as an aquarium. On wet days seaweed can be stuck on cards or in a book. The best way to get it to spread out and not crease on a card, is to float the little pieces in a basin and slip the card underneath them in the water. When the seaweed has settled on it,

take the card out and leave it to dry. The seaweed will then be found to be stuck, except perhaps in places here and there, which can be made sure by inserting a little touch of gum. It is the smaller, coloured kinds of seaweed that one treats in this way; and it is well to leave them for a day in the sun before washing and preparing, as this brings out their colour. The ordinary large kind of seaweed is useful as a barometer. A piece hung by the door will tell when rain is coming by growing moist and soft.

A good use for little shells is to cover small boxes with them. The shells are arranged in a simple pattern and fastened on with seccotine. If the shells are not empty and clean, boil them, and scrub them with an old tooth-brush.

So many interesting things are to be seen at the seaside that there is no need to be always at play. Fishermen will come in with their boats, which need pulling up; or a net that has been dropped near the shore will be drawn in from the beach, and you can perhaps help. If the town is not merely a watering-place but also a seaport, it is, of course, better, because then there will be the life of the harbour to watch. To be friends with a lighthouse man is almost as good a thing as can happen; and if there is both a lighthouse and a shipbuilder's you could hardly be more fortunate.

That there will be fishermen is, however, quite

certain, and you may perhaps get to know one properly. If you do, ask him to teach you how to tie good knots. It is a very useful thing to know. He will show you the difference between a granny and a right knot, and once you have learned this you will never tie a granny again.

Donkey rides are rarely quite so good as you hope they will be. It is only now and then that the saddle is comfortable, or the reins of the least use, or the stirrups the right length; and the donkey scrapes your leg against the wall or a post much too often. Donkey boys are also too fond of breaking a bargain. In hiring donkeys, the donkey boy's idea of what the time is should always be compared with a clock or watch and the difference pointed out to him.

Now and then niggers ought to have a penny.

# ONCE UPON A TIME [1]

## I.—The Devout Lover

ONCE upon a time there was a fox who fell in love with a pretty little lady fox. He called her either Sweet Auburn or Loveliest Vixen of the Plain, and in the small hours, when all the world was asleep, they went for delightful strolls together, and talked a deal of pleasant nonsense, and killed numbers of young chickens, feeding each other with tit-bits, as lovers do.

One day Sweet Auburn casually mentioned her approaching birthday, which chanced to be on May the 15th, and said she would like nothing so much as gloves.

'What colour?' he asked.

'Purple,' she told him; and he agreed.

'With white and purple spots inside,' she added; and he agreed again.

'And lined with glistening hairs,' she called after him; and he agreed once more.

When, however, he told his mother, the old lady was discouraging. 'They won't be out by then,' she said, 'fox-gloves won't.'

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

His mother was a widow. An unfortunate meeting with the local pack had deprived her for ever of her beloved chicken-winner. She had however brought up, with much pluck and resource, her family, unaided.

'You 'll never get them by the 15th,' she added, 'that 's a fortnight too early.'

'But I must,' replied her son, with the impetuosity and determination of youth.

'You 'll never,' said his mother.

Undismayed he set forth and searched the countryside for fox-gloves. He found many plants in various early stages of growth, but all were far indeed from the time to exhibit their stock-in-trade.

'What did I tell you ?' said his mother.

The day drew nearer. He extended his travels, but in vain, until one morning, at about a quarter to five, when he ought to have been at home again, he came upon a fox-glove stalk which actually had buds on it. Carefully marking the spot, he rushed back with the news.

'But how can blossoms be ready in four days ?' he asked his mother.

'Intensive culture,' said the old lady. 'There 's nothing but that.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said her son.

'Of course not ; you 're only a child. It means you must supply heat and nourishment. You must curl your warm body round that stalk every evening

as soon as the sun sets, and lie there without moving till the sun 's up, and you must water the roots with your tears. On no account must you move or nap.'

'Really?' he asked nervously.

'If you truly love,' said his mother.

'I wonder,' he thought; but after paying another visit to Sweet Auburn he knew that he did, and he promised her the gloves for a certainty.

Late on the evening of the 15th, when she had almost given him up, he staggered into her abode, wan and weary, and laid a pair of superb gloves at her feet. They were a beautiful purple lined with glistening hairs, and they had white and purple spots inside.

'Many happy returns,' he said. 'They 're absolutely the first of the season. You 'll be able to set the fashion.'

'Darling Reynolds!' she replied, embracing him, and named the happy day.

## II.—Ups and Downs[1]

Once upon a time towards the end of June, the birds gathered together to compare notes as to the nesting season. It is a regular habit—a kind of stock-taking.

'And what has been your luck?' the owl asked the plover.

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

'Half and half,' said the plover. 'My first clutch of eggs—beauties they were, too—were found by a farm boy, and within a couple of days they were being devoured by a pretty actress, at one-and-six apiece; but I need hardly say,' added the plover with a wink, 'that it was not the little lady herself who paid for them.

'So I laid again,' the plover continued, 'and this time we pulled through; and this very morning I've been giving my family a lesson in taking cover. The difficulty is to make them keep their silly little beaks shut when they're in danger: they will *cheep* so, and that, of course, gives the show away. Still, chicks will be chicks, you know.'

'Yes, indeed,' replied the owl; 'but years will put that right only too successfully'; and both birds sighed.

'Yes,' said the nightingale to the woodpecker, 'I managed capitally. I had a wonderful season. Every night people came to hear me sing; Caruso couldn't have more devoted audiences. We brought up a healthy family, too, with strong musical tendencies. In fact, it wasn't till yesterday that anything went wrong; and that wasn't exactly a calamity, although it hurt me quite a little bit.'

'Tell me,' said the woodpecker.

'With pleasure,' said the nightingale. 'It was like this: I flew from the hedge just as that nice lady at the Grange came along with her little girl,

and the little girl saw me and, as children always do—you 've all heard them time and again—asked the mother what that pretty brown bird was called. Now this, you must understand, is the lady who has been leaning out of her window every night all through June just to hear me sing; she has even written a poem to me; but what do you think she said to the little girl in reply? "That brown bird, darling? That 's only a sparrow." '

'You 've been as immoral as usual, I suppose?' said the thrush to the cuckoo.

'Quite,' said the cuckoo, 'if by immorality you mean taking furnished lodgings for my family instead of going in for small ownership, like you.'

'That 's not wholly what I meant,' said the thrush. 'There 's such a thing as taking furnished apartments and paying for them, and there 's such another thing as depositing your family there and never showing up again.'

'Still,' said the cuckoo, 'it 's a very small family—only one. I never deposit more than one egg in each nest.'

'I wish, all the same,' said the thrush, 'you 'd tell me why you are so averse from erecting a home of your own.'

'I don't exactly know,' said the cuckoo, 'but I think it 's fastidiousness. I never can find a site to suit me. Either there 's no view, or the water 's

bad, or I dislike the neighbours; try as I will, I never can settle. So there you are!'

'And who, may I ask,' said the thrush, 'has had the honour of foster-mothering your illustrious offspring this season?'

'I selected nuthatches,' said the cuckoo; 'and they weren't half disagreeable about it either. While as for their own children, the little pigs, they couldn't have taken it with less philosophy. Grumbled day and night. My poor darlings were jolly glad when they were fledged, I can tell you.'

'What are you going to do with them?' the thrush asked.

'I haven't made up my mind,' said the cuckoo. 'What do you advise?'

'Apprentice them to a builder,' said the thrush as he flew away.

## III.—The Listener [1]

Once upon a time there was a man with such delicate ears that he could hear even letters speak. And, of course, letters lying in pillar-boxes have all kinds of things to say to each other.

One evening, having posted his own letter, he leaned against the pillar-box and listened.

'Here 's another?' said a voice. 'Who are you, pray?'

[1] From *A Boswell of Baghdad* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

'I 'm an acceptance with thanks,' said the new letter.

'What do you accept?' another voice asked.

'An invitation to dinner,' said the new letter, with a touch of pride.

'Pooh!' said the other. 'Only that.'

'It 's at a house in Kensington,' said the new letter.

'Well, *I 'm* an acceptance of an invitation to a dance at a duchess's,' was the reply, and the new letter said no more.

Then all the others began.

'I bring news of a legacy,' said one.

'I try to borrow money,' said another, rather hopelessly.

'I demand the payment of a debt,' said a sharp metallic voice.

'I decline an offer of marriage,' said a fourth, with a wistful note.

'I 've got a cheque inside,' said a fifth, with a swagger.

'I convey the sack,' said a sixth in triumph.

'I ask to be taken on again, at a lower salary,' said another, with tears.

'What do you think I am?' one inquired. 'You shall have six guesses.'

'Give us a clue,' said a voice.

'Very well. I 'm in a foolscap envelope.'

Then the guessing began.

One said a writ.

Another said an income-tax demand.

But no one could guess it.

'I 'm a poem for a paper,' said the foolscap letter at last.

'Are you good ? ' asked a voice.

'Not good enough, I 'm afraid,' said the poem. 'In fact I 've been out and back again seven times already.'

'A war poem, I suppose ? '

'I suppose so. I rhyme "trench" and "French."'

'Guess what I am,' said a sentimental murmur.

'Any one could guess that,' was the gruff reply. 'You 're a love-letter.'

'Quite right,' said the sentimental murmur. 'But how clever of you ! '

'Well,' said another, 'you 're not the only love-letter here. I 'm a love-letter too.'

'How do you begin ? ' asked the first.

'I begin "My Darling," ' said the second love-letter.

'That 's nothing,' said the first ; 'I begin "My Ownest Own." '

'I don't think much of either of those beginnings,' said a new voice. 'I begin "Most Beautiful." '

'You 're from a man, I suppose ? ' said the second love-letter.

'Yes, I am,' said the new one. 'Aren't you ? '

'No, I 'm from a woman,' said the second. 'I 'll admit your beginning 's rather good. But, how do you end ? '

'I end with "A million kisses," ' said the new one.

'Ah, I 've got you there ! ' said the second. 'I end with "For ever and ever yours." '

'That 's not bad,' said the first, 'but my ending is pretty good in its way. I end like this : "To-morrow will be Heaven once more, for then we meet again." '

'Oh, do stop all this love talk,' said the gruff voice again, 'and be sensible like me. I 'm a letter to an Editor putting everything right and showing up all the iniquities and ineptitudes of the Government. I shall make a stir, I can tell you. I 'm it, I am. I 'm signed "Pro Bono Publico." '

'That 's funny ! ' said another letter. 'I 'm signed that too, but I stick up for the Government.'

But at this moment the listener was conscious of a hand on his arm and a lantern in his face.

'Here,' said the authoritative tones of a policeman, 'I think you 've been leaning against this pillar-box long enough. If you can't walk I 'll help you home.'

Thus does metallic prose invade the delicate poetical realm of supernature.

## IV.—Nature [1]

Once upon a time there was a king who failed to please his subjects and was in consequence in instant peril. Hurriedly collecting together such treasures as he could, he and his young queen crossed the frontier one night with a few faithful retainers and settled in a secluded castle in a friendly country.

On the first wet day the young queen was missing. High and low the retainers searched for her, and at last she was discovered in the middle of an open space in the forest, holding up her face to the rain.

Horror-stricken, they hurried to her aid; but she waved them back.

'Do let me stay a little longer,' she pleaded. 'All my life I have longed to feel the rain and I was never allowed to. All my life there have been coaches and umbrellas.'

And again the little queen held up her face to the drops.

## V.—The Uses of Criticism [2]

Once upon a time there was an innkeeper who, strange to say, was unable to make both ends meet. Nothing that he tried was any use: he even placed

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).
[2] *Ibid.*

in the windows a notice to the effect that his house was ' under entirely new management,' but that too was in vain. So in despair he consulted a wise woman.

' It is quite simple,' she said, as she pocketed her fee. ' You must change the name of your inn.'

' But it has been " The Golden Lion " for centuries,' he replied.

' You must change the name,' she said. ' You must call it " The Eight Bells " ; and you must have a row of seven bells as the sign.'

' Seven ? ' he said ; ' but that 's absurd. What will that do ? '

' Go home and see,' said the wise woman.

So he went home and did as she told him.

And straightway every wayfarer who was passing paused to count the bells, and then hurried into the inn to point out the mistake, each apparently believing himself to be the only one who had noticed it, and all wishing to refresh themselves for their trouble ; motorists, observing the discrepancy as they flew by, stopped their chauffeurs, and, with the usual enormous difficulty, got them to go back ; and the joke found its way into the guide-books.

The result was that the innkeeper waxed fat, lost his health and made his fortune.

## VI.—Senses and Sensibility

Once upon a time the following letters were exchanged between two gentlemen of London:

I

*From Fred Golightly, comedian, to Sinclair Studd, dramatic critic.*

Dear Studd,—I am not one ordinarily to take any notice of remarks that are overheard and reported to me; but there are exceptions to every rule and I am making one now. I was told this evening by a mutual friend and fellow-member that at the Buskin Club, after lunch to-day, in the presence of a number of men, you said that the trouble with me was that I had no sense of humour.

Considering my standing as a comedian, hitherto earning high salaries and occupying the place I do solely by virtue of my comedy gifts (as the Press and Public unanimously agree), this disparagement from a man wielding as much power as you do is very damaging. Managers hearing of it as your honest opinion might fight shy of me.

I therefore ask you to withdraw the criticism with as much publicity as it had when you defamed me by making it.

Why you should have made it at all I can't imagine,

for I have often seen you laughing in your stall, and we have more than once lunched together.

Believe me, yours sincerely,

FRED GOLIGHTLY.

II

*From Sinclair Studd, dramatic critic, to Fred Golightly, comedian*

DEAR GOLIGHTLY,—You have been misinformed. I didn't say you had no sense of humour ; I said you had no sense of honour.

Yours faithfully, SINCLAIR STUDD.

III

*From Fred Golightly, comedian, to Sinclair Studd, dramatic critic*

DEAR OLD CHAP,—You can't think how glad I am to have your disclaimer. I disliked having to write to you as I did, after so many years of good fellowship, but you must admit that I had some provocation. It is a pretty serious thing for a man in my position to be publicly singled out by a man in yours as being without a sense of humour. However, your explanation puts everything right, and all 's well that ends well. Yours as ever,

FRED.

## VII.—In Extremis [1]

Once upon a time a Nut lay dying. He was twenty-five. He had had a good time—too good—and the end was near.

There was no hope, but alleviation was possible. 'Is there anything,' he was asked, 'that you would like?'

He was plucky and prepared for the worst.

'Yes,' he said, 'I 'd like to know what I 've spent since I was twenty. Could that be arranged?'

'Easily,' they said.

'Good,' he replied. 'Then tell me what I 've spent on my bally old stomach—on food.'

'On food,' they replied. 'We find that you have spent on yourself an average of a pound a day for food. For five years that is, roughly, £1825.'

'Roughly?' said the Nut.

'Yes. Counting one leap year, it would be £1826. But then you have entertained with some freedom, bringing the total to £3075.'

'Yes,' said the Nut. 'And what about drinks?'

'We find,' was the reply, 'that on drinks your average has been three pounds a day, or about £5475 in all.'

'Good heavens!' said the Nut. 'What a noble thirst! And clothes?'

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

'The item of clothes comes to £940,' they said.

'Only three figures!' said the Nut. 'How did I come to save that odd £60, I wonder?'

'Not by any idea of economy,' they replied. 'Merely a want of time.'

'And let 's see,' said the Nut, 'what else does one spend money on? Oh yes, taxis. How much for taxis?'

'Your taxis,' they said, 'work out at seven shillings a day, or £639, 2s. 0d.'

'And tips?' the Nut inquired.

'Tips,' they said, 'come to £456.'

The Nut lay back exhausted, and oxygen was administered. He was very near the end.

'One thing more,' he managed to ask. 'What have I paid in cloak-room fees for my hat and stick?'

'Only £150,' they said.

But it was enough: he fell back dead.

## VIII.—The Door[1]

Once upon a time there was a sitting-room, in which, when every one had gone to bed, the furniture, after its habit, used to talk. All furniture talks, although the only pieces with voices that we can hear are clocks and wicker-chairs. Every one has heard a little of the conversation of wicker-chairs, which

[1] From *'Twixt Eagle and Dove* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

usually turn upon the last person to be seated in them; but other furniture is more self-centred and reticent.

On the night with which we are now concerned the first remark was made by the clock, who stated with a clarity only equalled by his brevity that it was one. An hour later he would probably be twice as voluble.

It was normally the signal for an outburst of comment and confidence; but let me first say that the house in which this sitting-room was situated belonged to an elderly gentleman and his wife, each conspicuous for peaceable kindliness. Neither would hurt a fly, but since they had grandsons fighting for England, liberty, and the world, it chanced that they were the incongruous possessors of quite a number of War relics, which included an inkstand made of a steel shell-top, copper shell-binding, and cartridge-cases; a Turkish dud from Gallipoli to serve as a door-stop; a pencil-case contrived out of an Austrian cartridge from the Carso; an English cartridge cigarette-lighter; and several shell-cases transformed into vases for flowers. One of these at the moment contained some very beautiful sweet peas, and the old gentleman had made a pleasant little joke, after dinner, about sweet peace blossoming in such a strange environment, and would probably make it again the next time they had guests.

You my be sure that, with the arrival of these

souvenirs from such exciting parts, the conversation of the room became more interesting, although it may be that some of the stay-at-homes began after a while to feel a little out in the cold. What was an ordinary table from the Tottenham Court Road to say in competition with a ·75 shell-case from the battle of the Marne? or a mere silver-wedding present from Bond Street against an inkstand composed of articles of destruction from Vimy Ridge, which had an irritating way of making the most of both its existences—reaping in two fields—by remarking, after a thrilling story of bloodshed, 'But that 's all behind me now. My new destiny is to prove the pen mightier than the sword'? Even though the silver-wedding present came from the choicest luxury shop in Bond Street, and had once been picked up and set down again by Queen Alexandra, what availed that? War trophies must always hold the floor.

Gradually the other occupants of the room had come to let the souvenirs uninterruptedly exchange their exciting impressions and speculate as to how long the War would last—a problem as to which they were not much more exactly informed than many a human authority. Under cover of this kind of talk, which is apt to become noisy, the chairs and the table and the mantelpiece, the pacific ornaments and the mirror, would chat in their own mild way: the wicker-chair, for example, wondering for the

thousandth time how long it would be before the young Captain sat in it once more ; and the mirror again remarking what a happy moment that would be when it held again the reflections of the Lieutenant and his fiancée, who was one of the prettiest girls in the world.

' Do you think so ? ' the knob of the brass fender would inquire—for articles of furniture, no less than ourselves, have a tendency to repetition. ' To me she seemed too fat and her mouth was very wide.'

' But that 's a fault,' the tongs would reply, ' that you find with every one.'

To return to the night of which I want particularly to speak, no sooner had the clock made his monosyllabic utterance than ' I am probably unique,' the Vimy Ridge inkstand said.

' How ? ' the cigarette-lighter sharply inquired, uniqueness being one of his chief claims to distinction.

' Because,' said the inkstand, ' the blacksmith who made me was not blown to pieces. The usual thing is for the shell to be a live one, and no sooner does the blacksmith handle it than he and the soldiers who brought it go to glory. Also two neighbours and the blacksmith's little daughter. The papers are full of such incidents. But in my case—no. I remember,' the inkstand was continuing—

' Oh, give us a rest,' said the shell door-stop. ' If you knew how tired I was of hearing about the War, when there 's nothing to do for ever but stop in this

stuffy room! And to me it 's particularly galling, because I never exploded at all. I failed. For all the good we are any more, we—we warriors—might as well be mouldy old fossils like the home-grown things in this room, who know of war or excitement absolutely nothing.'

'That 's where you 're wrong,' said a quiet voice.

'Who 's speaking?' the shell asked.

'I am,' said the door. 'You 're quite right about yourselves—you War souvenirs. You 're done. You can still brag a bit, but that 's all. You 're out of it. Whereas I—I 'm still in it. I can make people run for their lives.'

'How?' asked the inkstand.

'Because whenever I bang,' said the door, 'they think I 'm an air-raid.'

## IX.—The Vaseful[1]

Once upon a time a little company of the wild flowers of spring found themselves together in a vase. It was the first time that many of them had met; for although they came from the same district, indeed the same copse, and had heard of each other's characteristics, they had grown up too far away from each other for conversation, and flowers, of course, cannot walk. It was therefore with peculiar interest

[1] From *Cloud and Silver* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

that they now examined each other and fell a-talking.

There was naturally a little reserve at first, for social grades must be preserved; but they were so tightly packed in the vase, and for the most part so forlorn at their fate, that barriers soon disappeared, and the oxlip ceased to despise the cowslip, and the cowslip was quite nice to the primrose, and the purple orchis almost dropped his aristocratic drawl when talking to the bluebell.

The purple orchis, who was not only a heavy drinker but rather a bully, was the only one who was not unhappy to be there. 'I knew I should attract attention soon,' he said; 'there were so few of us and we 're so noticeable. By Jove, this tipple 's delicious!' and he took a long draught.

'Please don't push so,' said a small voice at his side.

'Why, what 's the matter?' the orchis asked. 'You anemones are always such weaklings.'

'I 'm afraid I feel rather faint,' replied the anemone. 'I 'm not strong at any time, it 's true, and just now, no matter how I stretch, I can't quite reach the water. I 'm afraid that little girl put me in the vase rather carelessly.'

'Or else'—the orchis laughed—'or else I 'm getting more than my share. Ha, ha!'

'Surely,' said the cowslip to a bluebell, 'there were more of you in the little girl's hands when we left the wood?'

'Alas, yes,' said the bluebell. 'Most of my closest friends were picked too, and I hoped we were all coming along together. But for some reason or other which has never been explained to me, bluebells seem to be more easily and more often thrown away after being picked than any other flower; and all my companions must have suffered that fate.'

'It is quite true,' said the cowslip. 'From my high position on the bank I have again and again seen bunches of bluebells forsaken by children. How is it, I wonder? It is not as if they were ugly; although blue is not every one's colour.'

'Perhaps,' said the cuckoo-spit with a touch of sarcasm, for he disliked the cowslip, 'it 's because you can't make tea of them.'

'No,' said the oxlip, who was looked up to as something of a sage by reason of his strength and his many eyes, 'it is because bluebells are so much more beautiful when they are in a wood among greenery than when they are packed together in a human hand, and the human hand suddenly realizes this and drops them in disappointment.'

'Thank you,' said the bluebell with a sigh of content.

'The wonder,' the oxlip continued with a glance at the cuckoo-spit, 'is that some flowers are ever picked at all.

Silence followed, broken by a little sigh. It was the dying anemone's last breath.

## X.—The Mother

Once upon a time a soldier was killed. The news came to his mother from the War Office. He had fallen fighting nobly at the head of his regiment.

She was inconsolable. 'Oh that I might see him again!' she prayed. 'If only for five minutes—but to see him!'

An angel answered her prayer. 'For five minutes,' the angel said.

'Quick! quick!' said the mother, her tears turned to momentary joy.

'Yes,' said the angel, 'but think a little. He was a grown man. There are thirty years to choose from. How would you see him?'

The mother paused and wondered.

'Would you see him,' said the angel, 'as a soldier dying heroically at his post? Would you see him as he left you to join the transport? Would you see him as you first saw him in his uniform? Would you see him again as on that day at school when he stepped to the platform to receive the highest honours a boy could have?'

'How did you know?' the mother asked, her eyes lighting.

The angel smiled. 'Would you see him as a baby at your breast? Would you——'

'No,' said the mother, 'I would have him for five minutes as he was one day when he ran in from the garden to ask forgiveness for being naughty. He was so small and so unhappy; and he was very hot, and the tears were making streaks down his face through the garden dirt. And he flew to my arms with such force that he hurt me.'

## TWO WAR POEMS

### I.—The Reward of our Brother the Poilu[1]

WE often talk of the best poem which the War has produced; and opinions usually vary. My own vote, so far as England is concerned, is still given to Julian Grenfell's lyric of the fighting man; but if France is to be included too, one must consider very seriously the claims of *La Passion de Notre Frère le Poilu*, by Marc Leclerc, which may be had in a little slender paper-covered book, at a cost, in France, where it has been selling in its thousands, of one franc twenty-five. This poem I have been reading with a pleasure that calls to be shared with others, for it is not only very touching and very beautiful, but it has also certain of those qualities which are more thoroughly appreciated in company. Beauty and tenderness can make their appeal alone; but humour demands two and does not resent a crowd, and the humour of this little masterpiece is very deep and true.

Did I say I had been reading it? That is to use words with unjustifiable looseness; rather should I say that I have been in part reading and in part

[1] From *A Boswell of Baghdad* (Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

guessing at it ; for it is written in the Angevin patois, which is far beyond my linguistic capacity. Not that Captain Leclerc is a rustic ; on the contrary, he is a man of culture and the author of several books chiefly on and about Anjou, one of which has illustrations from his own hand ; but it has amused him in this poem to employ his native dialect, while, since he, like so many French authors, is fighting, the soldierly part of it is authentic.

It was a poor devil of a Poilu—it begins—and he went to the war, automatically enough, knowing without any words about it that the soil which he cultivated must also be defended. That was his duty. After suffering the usual ills of the campaign, suddenly a 210 burst near him, and he never rallied. He just had time to give a few messages to the corporal before he died. 'You must tell my wife,' he said, 'but do it gradually ; say I 'm ill first. Give what money I have here to my pals,' and so forth. Then, after repeating his testament, he passed quietly away.

On reaching the gate of Heaven the Poilu finds St. Peter beating the mats. 'Wipe your shoes,' St. Peter says, 'and take the right-hand corridor. The Judgment Hall is at the end.' All trembling, the poor fellow passes along the corridor, at the end of which an angel in white takes down particulars as to his name, his class, and so forth, and tells him that he is expected. Entering the Judgment Hall, the

Poilu is bewildered by its austerity and splendour. The Good God is at the head, between Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin. All the saints are there, and the Poilu notices particularly the military ones—St. George, St. Hubert, St. Michael, St. Leonard, St. Marcel, St. Charlemagne, St. Martin, St. Sulpice, St. Barbe, St. Maurice, and St. Jeanne d'Arc. Seeing all these famous soldiers, he exclaims, 'It 's a Conseil de Guerre! Perhaps I can slip away.' But escape is impossible, and at this moment the Good God tells him to begin his history.

'What did you do before the war?' He asks. The Poilu replies that he was a farmer in a very small way; he worked on the land, and he had some stock—two oxen, a horse, a cow, a wife, some fowls, 'and, saving your presence, a pig.' 'Ah!' exclaims St. Anthony, 'a pig! That reminds me! Pigs! Sois béni, mon frère.' But the Good God frowns, and St. Anthony makes himself very small.

And then, the Poilu continues, he became a soldier, which leads to the awkward question, had he always behaved himself as such? Alas! it appears that he had not. For one thing, he has not always been sober, he is confessing, when Noah interrupts with the comment that insobriety is not such a very serious affair. In fact, he himself once . . . and by this time the reader begins to get the drift of this joyous humane fantasy, the point being that the hierarchy of Heaven are all on the side of the brave simple

soldier who has died that France might live. As how could they not be? Another time, the Poilu continues, he was sent to prison for cutting a piece from his coat in order to mend the seat of his trousers—in other words, for injuring Government property; and here St. Martin breaks in with indignation at the punishment. 'Why, when I did very much the same,' he says, 'and cut my cloak to cover a paralytic, I was canonized for it!' And so on.

Then comes a graver note. The Poilu, feeling an effort to be necessary, for the Good God has never relaxed His sternness throughout, becomes eloquent. Not only was he killed, but before that, he says, he suffered much. The hardships of war on the Western front are terrible. He had been famished, he had been frozen, he had been burned by the sun. He had been sleepless, he had been footsore, and the sweat had poured from him under his heavy burdens, for often he had carried not only his own haversack, but those of his comrades. In short . . . But here St. Simon, speaking softly to Christ, says, 'Like you, Lord, at Golgotha.' In my prose this is, of course, too crude; but I assure you that in the poem it is a great moment. And another follows it, for as the Good God still says nothing, the Poilu points to the blue robe of the Blessed Virgin, and to the great white beard of the Good God himself, and to the red cloak of our Lord, and exclaims, 'Voilà mes trois couleurs. The three colours of France. It was

for them that I have lost my life; fighting for them has brought me to this Judgment Hall!'

That is fine, is it not? Only the French genius is capable of just such a splendid blend of naïveté, emotion, and the best kind of theatricalism. And at these words at last the Good God smiles, and behind Him Heaven opens for the Poilu to enter.

There is a little more—for it seems that Heaven is full of Poilus with blue caps, and golden helmets, and wings that remove the possibility of getting wet feet or weary feet any more for ever and ever. And our Poilu joins these others, who look happy and are happy, and sings with them 'Glory to God in the highest,' while the angels, not perhaps wholly without irony, answer, 'Peace on earth and goodwill to men.'

## II.—'The Return'

Of all the Allies the English are, I suppose, least inclined to blow their own trumpet. Whether this is due to national carelessness and diffidence, or to the conviction, subconsciously entertained, that we are superior 'beyond words,' I leave to the sociologist to determine; nor shall I embark upon the perilous task of deciding which of the other belligerents on our side—French, Americans, Australians, Canadians, Welsh, Italians, or Scotch—have the best opinion

of themselves. All that I am disposed to do at the moment is to record the private belief that a touch more of good conceit would do us no harm, and pass on to the consideration of another French war poem that has come my way, in which the poet very properly allows no false shame to stay his eulogistic muse when she is singing of the glory of his beloved country's indomitable troops. It is a fine example of the histrionic strain in the Gallic genius.

The poem, which is called 'Le Retour,' and was written by Lucien Boyer, imagines the end of the war and the re-entry into Paris, through the Arc de Triomphe, of the French Army. But let me, not too slavishly, paraphrase it.

The war was over, says the first stanza, and God in His starry fastness, hearing the sounds of triumph echoing from Dover to Tsing-Tau, asked what it was all about. (I do not pretend to explain why anything should be a mystery to the Omniscient and Omnipotent. That is for the poet to explain. Any way, not knowing, He had to inquire.) 'That, Seigneur,' replied one of the Heavenly Host, 'is because the victorious Allies are passing through the Arc de Triomphe.'

These words being overheard in Heaven there was a rush to the balconies, even the most stoical of the hierarchy wishing for a sight of the heroes; while Saint Peter, twisting his beard, sent for Flambeau, the grenadier (who, we must presume, was one of the

latest arrivals in Paradise from the Front) to explain the details of the triumph. And this that good fellow was only too pleased to do, for, as he said, all military glory was an open book to him.

That then—I here interrupt again—is the setting. Below, the various branches of the French Army—for it is on the French that the poet concentrates—on their wonderful procession into Paris. Above, the Father, the Patriarchs, the Saints, and the Angels, all consumed by curiosity; and the grenadier Flambeau, having the time of his immortal life, as *entrepreneur*.

First, says the next stanza, came the cavalry, like a huge breaking wave. 'There!' said Flambeau. 'Those are the Hussars and the Dragoons.' And such was the acclamation of the populace below that the doors of Heaven rattled.

'That 's nothing,' said Flambeau. 'That 's only the beginning. Here comes the Artillery.' And there was such a commotion of joy that the tempest reached to the skies.

'That 's nothing,' said Flambeau. 'You 're going to see something better than that. Ah! Here are the Engineers, and, see, the Aviators!' And such a roar of welcome met them that God complained that He was being deafened.

Then Flambeau announced the approach of the sailors; and this time the solar system succumbed to the excitement, and the sun shed his beams on

the heads of the heroes as though he were saluting kings.

'That 's nothing,' said Flambeau again, although moved almost to tears. 'Wait till you see the Infantry. That will be something terrific. In fact, I 'm afraid the hurrahs will do serious damage up here.' And as he spoke the men from the trenches were seen advancing—every one of them—all the weary intrepid warriors who for so long had been withstanding the enemy at close quarters: so long that they had almost taken root. On they came: it was like a vast sea of helmets, helmets. . . .

But where before there had been such acclamations, there was now nothing. Not a sound!

Flambeau burned with fury. 'What!' he shouted to his auditors. 'These men have braved death for their country, they have been famished, they have been frozen. There would have been no home comforts but for them; and when they return for their reward after years of privation and endurance and courage no one has a word to say! To think that Frenchmen should be so ungrateful!'

But then, again looking downward, his expression changed from indignation to ecstasy, for he saw that as the men from the trenches had drawn nearer, advancing like demi-gods, with their helmets dented and full of holes, behold the populace had fallen in silent homage upon its knees. The stillness was not disrespect, it was adoration.

That poem, says the soldier who has kindly sent me a copy of it, when recited by a Frenchman at an army concert, aroused the deepest enthusiasm ; and I can believe it. ' The picture,' he writes, ' of the crowd kneeling in silence to the infantry gave one a lump in the throat which may be a sign of weakness or of sentiment and pity, which are, perhaps, manifestations of the divine in our nature.'

That and the touching *Passion de Notre Frère le Poilu* are among the best examples of French war poetry, where every line is charged with emotional memory of the sufferings of France under the German invasion. Our own way, as I have said, is different ; we take so much more for granted, we decline to blow our own trumpets or even to let the poets do it for us. That is understood. When Julian Grenfell wrote his magnificent lines on the fighting man, it was not a British fighting man any more than a French, but *the* fighting man, a type. And when the author of *A Shropshire Lad*, who loves England as dearly as any man may, wishes to eulogize our ' Contemptibles,' see with what cool irony—cool, but burning, as ice can burn—he does it :

EPITAPH ON AN ARMY OF MERCENARIES

These, in the day when Heaven was falling,
The hour when Earth's foundations fled,
Followed their mercenary calling
And took their wages and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended ;
They stood, and Earth's foundations stay ;
What God abandoned, these defended
And saved the sum of things for pay.

Truly there are more ways than one to do most things—and each can be equally good.

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